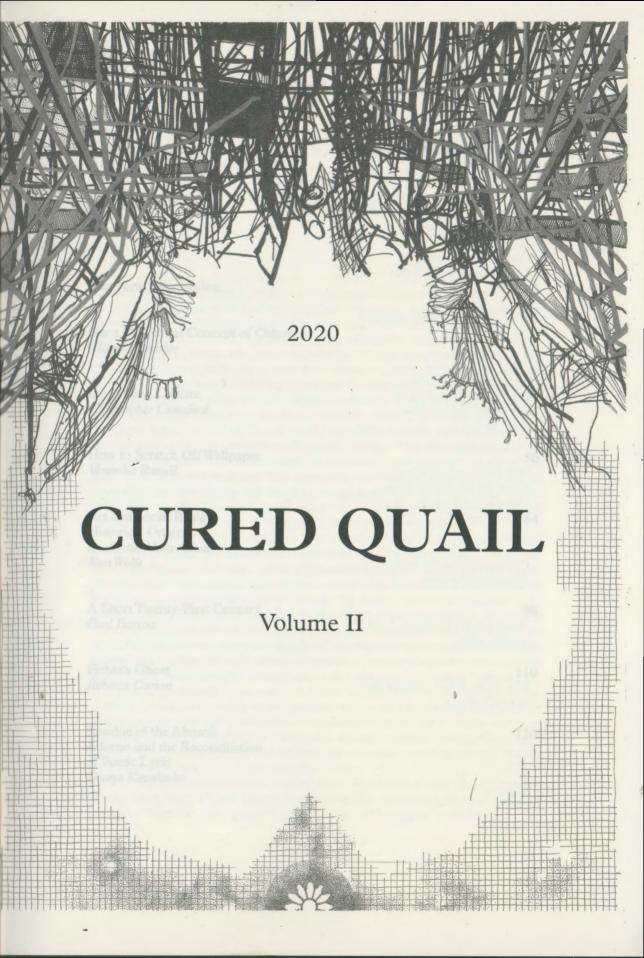


NEW YEAR PLEASE OF THE SEASON OF THE SEASON



CURED QUAIL

Volume II

The New Parochialism For a Dialectical Concept of Culture Marcel Stoetzler On Dosing Culture Christopher Crawford How to Scratch Off Wallpaper 56 Veronika Russell Art and Social Reality: Historical Origins of Aesthetic Abstraction Ross Wolfe A Short Twenty-First Century 98 Paul Barrow Fichte's Ghost 110 Rebecca Carson Residue of the Absurd: Adorno and the Reconciliation of Poetic Lyric George Kovalenko

Empowerment: An Infantile Disorder Eric-John Russell	126
Enemies of Art for the Sake of Its Realization: Some Comments on Crawford and Adorno A New Institute for Social Research	154
Wrong World, Right Wishing Christoph Hesse	172 mails O to repeated Consequent Culture
Narcissism as Norm: Psychic Deformation in Late Capitalist Society Peter Samol	182
Narcissus or Orpheus? Notes on Freud, Fromm, Marcuse and Lasch	190
Anselm Jappe	
Psychologizing Sociology? Alexandra Ivanova	216
What are the Children Lacking? Anselm Jappe	230
The Cave Where Echo Lies Juan Chabrier	244
051	Residue of the Absurd: Adorno and the Reconciliation of Poetic Lyric George Konslenko
References	273

The New Parochialism

There are some illnesses that only grow worse the more they are treated.

—Baldesar Castiglione

1.

Fleeing to Istanbul from Nazi terror, Erich Auerbach, mustering the strength to abandon his personal library, somehow sustained the weight of panicked times and devoted himself abroad to writing a book about books without any books. It is an endeavour not altogether dissimilar to our own: at a time of unprecedented catastrophe, the wherewithal of turning towards the depth of the seemingly mundane is not easy to surmise, or even justify. Yet Auerbach persevered, searching for where it happened in the history of western literature when it became possible to write about something of no importance and to treat the everyday with the utmost seriousness. *Mimesis* is a book about when the great humanity of all that is particular and ordinary emerges and then vanishes in a cloud of smoke over Western Europe. The last paragraph of its epilogue says more about the stakes of our own predicament than all of the daily news reports combined. It is alongside Auerbach's engagement with the everyday—as everything this society damages, everything it and its economy mangles into the deranged, everything which might yet also point beyond cultural desiccation—that *Cured Quail* here condones its sequel.

The inability to sit still is at a precipice. The choices are made clear: either accommodation to the bliss of ignorance or full identification with the incessant rhythm of a news cycle that has everyone by the throat. In both cases, within the present social catastrophe, industrial culture evades responsibility for its lies. It reasserts its right to console. Its refuge, currently referred to as a culture in quarantine, is fortified by the social need of waiting it all out. At the same time, the present moment cultivates an unprecedented privation, for which hell has now become the *absence* of other people. An ersatz socialization is bracketed while we stare into the mirror. A mandatory turn towards the interior, for both essential workers and otherwise, unfurls a frail 'immobility of a person paralyzed by anxiety.' (Adorno 2006b: 37)

Yet the anxiety of the lonely as a cultural canon won't produce anything resembling Schönberg's *Erwartung*, despite the plot of the monodrama resembling so close our own situation. Instead, anxiety is awakened amidst cultural malnutrition and loneliness is silenced in a sea of celebratory communicative discourse. Watch as with brittle bones we Zoom into the future.

Here is discovered the twofold axes upon which *Cured Quail Volume 2* pivots: continual cultural impoverishment and its concomitant psychological injuries. Together they ground what can be called a new parochialism: the loneliness of common measure, a newfound togetherness in separation, which global mandates of lockdown only bring into focus, but which can proceed without. We have become unanchored subjects bereft of patient hearings. The new parochialism refers to the bonding of peripherals, subjective interiors defensively guarded against uncertain times yet situated within a reigning cultural generality that remains universally accessible. It is adaptation to a sky without a sun, procuring a great synthesis of rural life—domestic rigidity, confrontation with the landlord, gossip—and the cosmopolitanism of industrialized culture. 'So every conscience, there is open to the light of day, just as these silent, dark, impenetrable houses contain no mysteries. [...] There is not a passer-by in the street who is not closely examined.' (Balzac 1990: 6) The new parochialism is the proximity of social distance within an illiterate society.

2.

A society that conceals nothing brandishes a faithlessness that hesitates at nothing. Everything is polluted, sacred and profane alike. Culture remains provincial and empty, a reality of which we can easily remind our readers, should they exist. Most notably caught within this social situation are the means of social communication, which despite at present confined to the parochial enclaves of one's living quarters, unrelentingly insist on their omnipotent technological capacities. It is no mystery why Leninists are increasingly skilled at social media. They have always reduced communism to electrification. Mass communication within modern society, hardly unilateral, basks in the warmth of unobstructed integration. Who would dare denounce its rays at a time when vitamin D assumes fundamental importance? While condemned to mere subsistence, everyone finds

'themselves perfectly qualified to add their brushstrokes to the frescos of [its] sociology.' (Internationale Situationniste 1997: 260) Yet a frenzy of information imports its language and vernacular in a way that rivals the intimidation tactics of the police. We are made to speak without ambiguity and instantaneously, lest we fade away.

Within the standards of mass communication, through algorithmic data processing and in the name of the communicable, the distribution of information and imagery collapses geographical borders yet all the while fortifying the continuance of privation as a new parochialism. It is the cultivation of a language 'comprising some six or eight constantly repeated turns of phrase and fewer than two hundred terms, most of them neologisms, with a turnover of a third of them every six months. All this favours a certain hasty solidarity.' (Debord 2004: 9) Predictive text reveals the same nouns always already accompanied by the same adjectives and participles, a shape of life that has grown old, stale and, in fact, parochial. It is the regimented organisation of the whole society reflected in the language of human beings. Alternatives consist only in incessant referenda with a controlled scope of acceptable responses; sad emoji for a dead relative, laughing emoji for a detached ironic quip.

Any natural ability to assimilate information from the surrounding world has been liquidated. Yet it is not technology that has made communication what it is today but the whole of society. Starting perhaps from the daily newspaper, the linguistic usage of information fast became a deadening literacy whose language regime coupled with an unprecedented speed of image circulation and the accelerated turnover of events has inaugurated what *Cured Quail Volume 1* called illiteracy. Naturalized hierarchy and inertia as fortifications of custom have been displaced by the progressive forces of monetary exchange, mass education, communications networks, global integration, philosophies of progress – in a word, the society of capital. The question of *Cured Quail* is how this triumph brought with it its own unique illiteracy and parochial outlook, a set of archaisms by which people feel obliged to have ideas on everything and to form *Weltanschauungen* that give meaning to their anxiousness. Yet 'they pronounce their words in such a drawling way that it seems as if they are about to expire on the spot.' (Castiglione 1967: 61) We need to therefore combine, as is done in the essays that follow, an analysis of cultural vacuity with an 'anxiety

3.

There exists at present, most notably amongst the left and beyond, a tendency for recourse into psychoanalysis for explanations on everything social theory has failed to give account. Movements of the right are illuminated by authoritarian personalities; millennial self-centeredness is matched with its own pop psychologisms; the failure of communist groupuscules is imported into the algebraic notations of group psychology. Psychology moves into the foreground with sociology receding into a presumed background. Or the reverse by which the life of an individual appears only as a bourgeois fiction, instead of a potential snuffed out at every opportunity. From Talcott to Chibber, when social structure is held as irreducible, the individual disappears under a quilt of behaviors, motivations and attitudes. In both cases, we find the failure to examine the relationship between psychoanalysis and sociology which resultantly allows a myriad of psychoanalytic categories to be 'applied' wherever therapeutically convenient. Left unexamined is how we might best grasp at present the relationship between the individual and society, rather than elevating one at the expense of the other.

Though an attractive proposition, the price of conceptual harmony is a homogeneity of observation as easily at home in a peer-reviewed journal as it is in a Venmo payment. Irrationality is reduced to all that is implicit in human activity, whereas the rational is simply its opposite, just as commensurable. From the perspective of the damaged, hypostasizing this relationship is the last error that can be made between the realms. The individual and the extant social system ultimately appear as an unrealized norm, a question of empowerment through the right kind of 'praxis'. The problematic of the mental healthminded activist becomes: how can we change the world if we are so affected by it? Indeed, so affected in the very tautologies they pose, 'it is seen this way only from the blinkered perspective of a social process that from the outset moulds the individual into a mere agent of his function in the total process.' (Adorno 1967: 73)

Cured Quail's evaluation of literacy must search not just on the interface between reality

and the individual, but in its translation to unconscious processes, the very capacity for this translation, and most essential, the history of it. Living psychoanalytic acumen details the grafted skin of this world, along with all its real abstractions as they play out in the individual's wishes and fears across a spectrum of sickness. The theoretical insights of a negative psychoanalysis would first of all take advantage of the flames that have consumed its roof, excavating the hidden methodological contortions of its beams over time. We might then hope to propose the individual and society, at once swept up in the momentum of our era all the while carrying with us sometimes unrecognizable artifacts, scars, faculties and potentials.

4.

Cured Quail was almost stillborn. Vilified as an insensitive and slanderous publication, this has been enough to prevent us from being read, like all the other writings which can be judged through hearsay and readymade verdicts, therewith inadvertently confirming the thesis of our inaugural volume. Through a confluent series of registers, Cured Quail was and continues to be a journal premised on the likelihood of never being read. Yet exile can either wear the exiled out, or develop whatever is greatest in them. The imbecile, especially when scandalized, makes for a great resonance chamber. Our critique advances and responses to Cured Quail Volume 1—which range from accusations of boring obscurantism to intolerable pretentiousness—cannot be said to receive any satisfactory rebuttal in the pages that follow. This is intentional. In the words of Ivan Chtcheglov, '[o]ur imaginations, haunted by the old archetypes, have remained far behind the sophistication of the machines' (Situationist International 2006: 2) and, we might add, their functionaries. It is a point of pride. We prefer to remain in obscurity if the alternative means pandering to an illuminated terrain of indeterminate chatter that was, from the beginning, the object of our critique.

Cured Quail refused to compete with other journals and with the prescribed obligations of other milieu periodicals saturated by unfounded optimism, base reportage, promotional copy or run-of-the-mill academicism. In most cases, a parody of grade school writing dominates alongside a frugality of ideas to match the cheapness of the paper quality. Existing publications serve to define what must not be done. With *Cured Quail*, unwilling to crack

into a definitive niche, the militant registers our concerns as epiphenomenal while the artist remains timidly curious. For both cases, it ought to be noted how much the layout and design of *Cured Quail Volume 1* helped structure these responses.

The reader will undoubtedly be aware that our approach to this second volume differs dramatically from the formatted design of Cured Quail Volume 1, which admittedly sought to play havoc with the contemporary sense of reading. There, while honoring the magnitude of the content by refusing to explicitly explain its form, the writing appeared without paragraph and article breaks, pagination or any indication on where the reader ought to take a breath and pause. When the project of *Cured Quail* first arose, we encountered the aporia of a journal self-knowingly premised upon an illiterate society. Again, this meant that in all likelihood, the journal will not be read. It used to be the case that a piece of writing demanded the reader follow its tempo, twists and turns. The situation had reversed. The imposition of happy endings synchronizes with the expectant reader. As a result, the writer obeys. An illiterate readership has cultivated illiterate writers. It is a relation that yields books yet to be written. How to translate this problem into the design of *Cured Quail Volume 1* was a problem we took seriously, that is, how the journal's contents must harmonize with its form. One element we pursued was to abandon the techniques of what designers today call readability or accessibility. Most book and web designers take for granted that a book or website should be used to extract information functionally. They then use a set of standards for how to organize and display text and images. In contrast, ours was an approach reminiscent of the Renaissance, '[w]here there was so much care to show honour to the contents of a book by the beauty of its outward form [so that] it is intelligible that the sudden appearance of printed books was greeted at first with anything but favour.' Here, for the avid collector, it would have been shameful to own a printed book. Yet in Florence at the time, we are told that there was no one who couldn't read; 'even the donkeymen sang the verses of Dante' (Burckhardt 1990: 133, 136).

Cured Quail Volume 1 was formatted with these issues in mind and indeed presented an almost insurmountable challenge to the reader even though its pages were not overly busy or illegible. The typeface and margins were intentionally chosen as soft on the eyes. The use of typographic space, in the tradition of *Tristram Shandy* no less than Mallarmé's 'Un coup

de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard', contributed overall to the collapse of a painless narrative. Yet we find there also an objective rhythm hardly daunting. Of course it is not wholly easy to jump to individual articles whose author may be particularly sought. *Cured Quail Volume 1* was not designed to be *skimmed* but to be *read*. While the absence of page numbers and paragraph breaks might momentarily inconvenience, there are nevertheless clues, illustrated with the nineteenth century engravings of Rodolphe Bresdin, on how to distinguish the individual contributions.

Yet it remained the case that the design of the inaugural volume of *Cured Quail* presented difficulties for an illiterate society. It aimed to be an experimental attack upon any potential readers not willing to actually read the journal and the society that produced them. Much was learned through this foray into the literate society that *Cured Quail* sought to examine. Here however, for *Cured Quail Volume 2*, the problem continues to be posed, yet its expression now requires a reorganization of means. To what degree might our audience expand if given rudimentary assistance? Do they remain silent for other more sinister reasons or has expediency simply become the order of the day for communicating anything whatsoever?

5.

We might here, in beginning the second volume, offer in direct terms a second experiment for testing illiteracy. In the sixteenth century, Erasmus, writing in his *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, offers 'an experiment'. He invites his readers to see how many variations can be formulated for the statement: 'Your letter has delighted me very much.' (Erasmus 1963: 16; Jacoby 2020: 96) Seemingly straightforward and without much possibility for altering its meaning, the sentence is subsequently given a hundred and fifty variations. A sample:

- 'What you wrote has given me incredible pleasure.'
- 'Your epistle has cheered me exceedingly.'
- 'How should I tell you what joy titillated the spirit of your Erasmus when he received your letter.'
- 'When I looked at your letter an extraordinary multitude of joys seized by mind.'

• 'No dainty so caresses the palate as your letter charms my spirit.'

As an anecdotal manner for evaluating what this society has done to both language and communication, we ask our readers to try for themselves to erect a commonplace expression ornamented with the non-instrumental inflections and subtleties that only social relations deserve.

Erasmus' concern for linguistic refinement and delicacy would reappear two centuries later in *Sturm und Drang* posterboy Johann Georg Hamann and his short essay 'New Apology of the Letter *h*'. It offers an orthographical defense for the unpronounced letter *h* which, at the time and according to its detractors, 'has been inserted between syllables by inattentive and unthinking hack writers and so-called chancellery writers; and that this spelling of this letter *h* is a pointless, groundless custom that appears barbaric in the eyes of all foreigners and injurious to the nation and must be abolished.' (Hamann 2007: 147) Hamann allows the letter *h* to defend itself, on the grounds that language, against its enemies, should renounce exactitude and the crass coercion of clarity—'a ravening brutality in sheep's clothing' (Ibid: 157)—and take pleasure in the innocent breadth of our social relations. Indeed, the letter *h* reminds its adversaries: 'Your life is what I am—a breadth.' (Ibid: 160) *Cured Quail* wants and can only impose upon itself the duty of displeasing people who have never anguished with reflection over writing a letter or a sentence amidst the harsh demand to become practical, and therewith, for Erich Auerbach, do justice to the minutiae of our li*h*ves.

Cured Quail

References

Adorno, Theodor W. (1967), 'Sociology and Psychology (Part I)', in: *New Left Review* 46, Nov/Dec: 67-80.

Adorno, Theodor W. (2006) 'Schoenberg and Progress', in: *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 27-102.

Balzac, Honoré de (1990) *Eugéne Grandet*, trans. S. Raphael, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burckhardt, Jacob (1990) *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G. C. Middlemore, London: Penguin Books.

Castiglione, Baldesar (1967) *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull, London: Penguin Books.

Debord, Guy (2004), *Panegyric: Volumes 1 and 2*, trans. J. Brook and J. McHale, London: Verso.

Erasmus, Desiderius (1963), *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, trans. D.B. King and H. D. Rix, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.

Hamann, Johann Georg (2007), 'New Apology of the Letter h', in: *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, trans. K. Haynes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 146-163.

Internationale Situationniste (1997), 'Communication Prioritaire', in: *Internationale Situationniste: Édition augmentée*, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard: 260-264.

Jacoby, Russell (2020) *On Diversity: The Eclipse of the Individual in a Global Era*, New York: Seven Stories Press.

Situationist International (2006), 'Formula for a New Urbanism', in: *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. K. Knabb, Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets: 1-8.

or a Dialectical Concept of Culture[1]

Marcel Stoetzler

What follows shall explore a slightly mysterious formulation found in a sociology textbook used by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research in the 1950s and collectively written by several of its members, including Adorno and Horkheimer: 'Once civilization will have spread and liberated itself to the extent that there will be no more hunger on this earth, civilization will fulfil what all culture, down to this day, has kept promising in vain.' (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research 1972: 95; Institut für Sozialforschung 1956: 88)

Culture is said here to make, or to have made, a promise that it fails to fulfil, while civilization is said to deliver on the promise that culture made by way of defeating and abolishing hunger. The passage employs a conceptual distinction that is rather notorious in the German context: culture and civilization. The use of these two concepts as clear-cut opposites became canonical in the decades before and after World War I, whereas in the preceding century they had been either nearly synonymous or distinct albeit complementary concepts.[2]

The authors of the Frankfurt sociology textbook employ in this quote a textual strategy that is typical of their work: they turn a given constellation of concepts dialectically against itself. They argue that the promise of culture draws its meaning and relevance only from the actuality and the potentials of civilization, whereas in the prevailing usage (in German, since the late nineteenth century and still, more or less, at the time) culture is deemed superior and antagonistic to civilization. The civilizational deed of abolishing hunger will make good on the promise held out by culture, and will in itself be a cultural-civilizational turning point.

The concept of culture under consideration here emerged in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, i.e. during the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and their aftermath, and referred to the man-made aspects of evolutionary progress against nature on the one hand and the *ancien régime* on the other. It pits the progress of culture and civilization against the crude, brutal society of the time that was understood to have derived

from a kind of warrior society. It contained both normative and descriptive aspects, inseparably intertwined, and also produced the related notion of culture as a separate sphere within the modern form of society, different from other equally separate 'spheres' such as the political and the economic, which are all understood to have their own specific logics and to be more or less independent from each other. I refer to both of these sets of ideas as the dialectic of the concept of culture, and want to defend this dialectic against the less than dialectical concepts of culture that emerged later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: first, culture (or civilization) is both a *normative* idea as it carries a promise of emancipation, something better than reality, and a *descriptive* concept that accounts for something that actually exists; second, culture both is and isn't a particular sphere within society where cultural things happen. It is not a sphere insofar as culture, or civilization, is simply another word for society, looked at under the perspective of culture and civilization.

The critique of civilization has a long history. Apart from its presence in classical Greek literature, especially tragedy and Platonic philosophy, perhaps the most canonical example in the European context is Tacitus' *Germania* (ca. 98 AD), a description of the Germanic 'barbarians' on the borders of the Roman Empire.[3] Written in overtly sympathetic tones, it constituted a not so inconspicuous attack on the decadence of Roman civilization. (German proto-patriots adored it when it was discovered in the Renaissance period and has unsurprisingly remained the Germans' favourite Latin classic.) Countless other examples could be adduced from the ascetic tendencies in probably all major religions: Taoist, Buddhist and Christian monks who had turned to the deserts, mountains and forests in order to part with the machinations of the civilizations that had produced their religions in the first place (c.f. Wolf 1994). In many ways, these drop-outs and cultural critics of culture were the carriers of what would later be canonized as what is arguably best in it.

Kulturkritik, the critique of civilization, was a major intellectual tendency in Germany and elsewhere in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was one of the factors that intellectually set the scene for the Conservative Revolution and National Socialism. The concept is discussed in a key essay by Adorno, also from the 1950s, titled 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft'.[4] Adorno here works through an ambivalence in the concept under examination: he discusses, on the one hand, the critique of civilization in the

sense just sketched out and, on the other hand, the professional activity of cultural criticism, as in art or theatre criticism, which are different but historically related phenomena. Both are, in the form discussed here, products of the second half of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, both are central topics of the antisemitic literature of that period which often singles out allegedly Jewish criticism of specific cultural phenomena or artefacts, such as books or plays, as particularly repulsive aspects of the culture or civilization that they profess to disdain. For the purposes of this essay, I will look at passages only that refer to the former, the critique of civilization itself.

One of the essay's leitmotifs is the constitution of 'culture' as a specific, separate sphere of activity in, but seemingly also apart from, society, as well as the body of particular artworks that constitute that 'culture':[5]

The rejection of the chain of indebtedness [*Schuldzusammenhang*] of a life that reproduces itself blindly and brutally, the insistence on independence and autonomy, on the separation from the prevailing realm of purposes, implies, at least as an unconscious element, the anticipation of [or demand or entitlement for] [*Anweisung auf*] a state of things in which freedom were realized.[6] This promise of culture remains ambivalent as long as its existence depends on a topsy-turvy world, in the last instance on the exploitation of the labour of others. (Adorno 1963: 12; Adorno 1981: 23)

In this topsy-turvy world, we can be sitting together chatting politely about culture, or otherwise reading in the comfort of a well-equipped library, only however on the basis of the exploitation of a tremendous amount of other people's labour. This needn't be so: the activities that are necessary for the reproduction of human society are now, thanks to civilizational progress, so few that they could be organized in a rational and non-exploitative way, allowing all of us to enjoy those cultural activities, if we so chose, without guilt, that is, without being part of a *Schuldzusammenhang*. In the current situation, however, this perfectly practical possibility must appear utopian.

Culture had to become, so Adorno continues, ideology—something that is true and false at the same time—when it was forced to renounce interference with the wider social world and

to withdraw into itself. Material praxis has evicted culture, and only 'broken,' evicted culture could declare distance from praxis a virtue as it signifies 'purity from the corrupting traces of the evil state of things that has expanded into a totality subsuming all spheres of existence.' Un-culture is the totality, whereas the sphere of culture can serve as a bridgehead from where battles against capitalist totality can be waged. Adorno reverses here the classical tradition, including Schiller, Fichte, Humboldt, Mill and Arnold, where culture is the bridgehead from where the totality of life and identity, maliciously fragmented by modern society, can be *regained*.[7] Culture 'can be faithful to humans' only by withdrawing from them, i.e. from a societal praxis that has become 'the opposite of culture,' namely 'the ever-new production of ever the same, the service of the customer in the service of the exploiter.' But culture's concentration on itself has undermined its own substance:

when the knifepoint [*Spitze*] which *Geist* points at reality is abstracted, turned away[8] from reality, its meaning changes even where this meaning is most strictly preserved. Through its resignation before the fatality of the life process, and, even more, through its isolation as one field among others, *Geist* aids the existing order and becomes itself merely a matter of fact. The emasculation of culture [...] is the result of culture's becoming self-consciously cultural, which in turn places culture in vigorous and consistent opposition to the growing barbarism of the economy's hegemony. (Adorno 1963: 12-13; Adorno 1981: 23-24)

While refraining from commenting here on Adorno's use of the metaphor of 'emasculation,' the notion that culture becomes 'self-consciously' cultural refers again to the development in which culture is constituted as a separate sphere isolated and evicted from other spheres of society.[9] The next sequence refers back to the first quoted sentence:

Whenever the critique of culture complains of materialism, it furthers the belief that the sin lies in peoples' desire for consumer goods, and not in the organization of the whole which withholds these goods from them: satiety rather than hunger. Could humanity command the wealth of goods, it would shake off the chains of that civilized barbarism which critics of culture ascribe to the advanced state of the *Geist* rather than to the retarded state of society. (Adorno 1963: 14; Adorno 1981: 24-25)

The goings on here are indeed mysterious: society has lost its culture as civilized barbarism has evicted it; culture withdraws and criticizes culture from the standpoint of (better or more) culture. Adorno describes here what are the real, social-historical grounds of the conceptual opposition of civilization to culture, while at the same time implying that culture and civilization are really the same thing, like Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Indeed, the conceptual history confirms that in the eighteenth century, when the concept emerged, what the German language refers to as 'Kultur' was referred to in English and French as 'civilization' or 'civilisation,' and that this remained so, more or less, for most of the nineteenth century. However, European languages tended to swap around their vocabulary so that by the end of the nineteenth century both roots were commonplace in all these languages. In a situation in which two words are available in a language that refer to the same thing—a thing in this case all the more tricky and contradictory—it is quite normal that language usage will try to make each one of the two words refer to one specific aspect of that complex thing, and this is indeed what happened in the case of culture and civilization. Although there were precursors, usage of the two near-synonyms, as if they were clear-cut opposites, became general practice, at least in Germany, France and England in the context of the run-up to World War I. Generally civilization tended to refer more to the social, political and economic aspects of progress, liberal reform and the wealth of the nation (in other words: capitalist development), while culture tended to refer more to the autonomy and self-conscious particularity of either the individual person or the individual nation. However, the usage of the two words remained rather arbitrary in that period both in Germany and elsewhere. It was never quite clear which is which, but most people seemed to agree in the strongest terms that Tweedledum and Tweedledee were certainly very different, and that the one needed to be defended from the other. This was the case especially the more those nations that supposedly embodied these concepts underwent the same processes of capitalist modernization and competed for the same place in the sun. The civilized and the cultured nation were merely differently accentuated articulations of what earlier in the eighteenth century was also referred to as the 'polished,' or polizierte (hence 'police,' 'policy' and *Polizei*), as opposed to the rude or savage nation.

The general historical process that expresses itself in this specific development is that the new form of society worked differently from its precursor in that it was not primarily

regulated by tradition, morality, religion or culture, but by its own logic and dynamic as described by the new discourse of political economy, the science of the dynamics of the new society that was denounced by conservative critics—critics of the new-fangled civilization and defenders of 'culture'—as the 'dismal science,' a formulation by Thomas Carlyle (1849: 672).[10] The fact that the capitalist economy does not answer to morality and is in this sense amoral has consistently been the main traditional form of the critique of capitalist civilization, including at the present time that of large parts of the 'anti-capitalist' and 'anti-globalization' movements. The principal exception was Karl Marx who recognized the reactionary character of such critiques and on occasion went as far as celebrating liberal-capitalist hegemony (now also known as 'globalization') for destroying traditional society. [11] Reactionary critiques of capitalism often took the form of antisemitism, a fact that was recognized by Marxists at the end of the nineteenth century (and subsequently forgotten by some on the left, at a time when regression into pre-marxist, pre-critical socialism had catastrophic effects).

The process in which culture became evicted from society and settled in its own separate sphere was the same process in which the subsumption of all spheres of social life under the logic of capital and commodity relations became totalized; totalization works by way of separation. This is the actual dialectic of the historical process. In another formulation by Adorno and Horkheimer, in the short text 'Quand même' ('nevertheless', or 'in spite of it all') in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 'culture has developed in the sign of the hangman' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1987: 248; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 180).[12]

§

Culture is the promise of emancipation, square meals and happiness; but then again, culture is garbage.

A key text on the liberal concept of civilization—one of the most influential pieces of political thought in the first third of the nineteenth century—is the 1828 lecture series given by historian and politician François Guizot under the title *The History of the Civilization in Europe Since the Downfall of the Roman Empire* (Guizot 1997). 1828 was nearly forty years

after the French Revolution of 1789 and two years before that of July 1830. In the context and aftermath of the former, the concept of liberalism was formed, referring to the moderate politics that would preserve the achievements of the Revolution while at the same time bring it to a close and prevent its return.

In the first of these lectures, Guizot taught that the concept of European civilization was composed of three elements: a Roman element, embodied in the ideas and practices of self-government, especially that of the communes; a Christian element, the belief in the existence of a moral law above legislation, the liberty of conscience and the separation of spiritual and temporal power; and a Germanic element, the notion of the unmediated bond between warrior and leader as individuals, and that of individual liberty as grounded in that relationship.[13] According to Guizot, the three elements that constitute European civilization correspond to the three main classes: bourgeoisie (which meant in this context owners of property resident in the towns and cities), clergy and nobility. The idea of civilization as a synthesis of their different contributions should provide the framework for lasting class compromise and prevent class conflict, which Guizot recognized was the motor uncontrollably driving liberal society forward; the revolution that indeed occurred only two years later only underlined the urgency of securing such mediation.

Not least the memory of the terror of the revolution, and the, at the time, well-founded fear amongst liberals that there might be another one coming, forced a somewhat unhappy complexion upon Guizot's liberalism:

For civilization is a sort of ocean, constituting the wealth of a people [...] this is so true, that even facts, which from their nature are odious, pernicious, which weigh painfully upon nations, despotism, for example, and anarchy, if they have contributed in some way to civilization, if they have enabled it to make an onward stride, up to a certain point we pardon them, we overlook their wrongs, their evil nature; in a word, wherever we recognize civilization, whatever the facts which have created it, we are tempted to forget the price it has cost. (Guizot 1997: 13)

The image of civilization as an ocean seems to anticipate the way culture was defined as

'the whole way of life' of a nation or people half a century later, while the recognition that 'we' tend to 'forgive' (ourselves?) for evil things if only to help civilization, i.e. 'the wealth of a people'.

The idea of progress, of development, appears to me the fundamental idea contained in the word, *civilization*, [...] the perfecting of civil life, the development of society, properly so called, of the relations of men among themselves. [...] Two facts, then, are comprehended in this great fact [civilization]; it subsists on two conditions, and manifests itself by two symptoms: the development of social activity, and that of individual activity; the progress of society and the progress of humanity. Wherever the external condition of man extends itself, vivifies, ameliorates itself; wherever the internal nature of man displays itself with lustre, with grandeur; at these two signs, and often despite the profound imperfection of the social state, mankind with loud applause proclaims civilization. [...] in the spontaneous, instinctive conviction of mankind, the two elements of civilization, the social development and the moral development, are closely connected together; [...] at the sight of the one, man at once looks forward to the other. [...] all the great developments of the internal man have turned to the profit of society; all the great developments of the social state to the profit of individual man. (Guizot 1997: 16, 18, 20)

Guizot affirms here a strong belief in the progress of civil life and social relations and in the dialectic between individual, moral, perhaps educational betterment and societal progress. A certain 'profound imperfection of the social state'—one may think of hunger, poverty and the relative absence of liberty, fraternity, equality—needs to be tolerated for a transitional period. However, don't hold your breath: Guizot warns that 'the consequences will come in due course, when the hour for them has arrived, perhaps not till hundreds of years have passed away.' (Guizot 1997: 21)

On one of the opening pages of 'Concerning Violence', Frantz Fanon writes that 'when the native hears a speech about Western culture he pulls out his knife' and 'laughs in mockery' (Fanon 1963: 43). If Fanon's 'native' fails to hear much of a promise in 'Western' speeches on culture, he, or she, or perhaps Fanon himself, may be recalling certain uses of the concept that fall under the category of what appear to liberals like Guizot as necessary evils:

for example when Napoleon reminded his soldiers in 1798, on the way to Egypt, that their conquest was of the highest importance for 'la civilisation et le commerce du monde.' (Fisch 1992: 720) We are warned, however, against a too easy endorsement of 'the native's' critique of civilization by the recognition that the same sentiment also is part of the rhetoric of the most barbarian exponents of Western civilization themselves: the Nazi playwright Hanns Johst coined the best known version of it, often ascribed to Goebbels: 'when I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun'.[14] On the other hand, the Nazi's professed opposition to culture would have been unfounded (had it been in good faith), as culture did not in turn actually oppose the Nazis. The most famous formulation that draws the conclusion from this fact is found in Adorno: 'writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, and this corrodes also the insight that says why it is impossible today to write poetry' (Adorno 1963: 26; Adorno 1981: 34)[15] —or, a few years later, 'culture is garbage.' (Adorno 2007: 367)

But in spite of its being garbage, or at least 'emasculated,'[16] there is still something in the liberal-Enlightenment conception of culture that needs to be defended, as stated at the outset. A classic statement on the emancipation side of the ledger is what Schiller suggested happens to people while watching a play (a cutting-edge social medium at the time):

Effeminate natures are steeled, savages made man, and, as the supreme triumph of nature, men of all ranks, zones, and conditions, emancipated from the chains of conventionality and fashion, fraternize here in a universal sympathy, forget the world, and come nearer to their heavenly destination. (Lloyd and Thomas 1998: 56)[17]

The cultural event helps human nature to triumph over the earthly world of conventions, fashions and divisions, over savagery as well as its opposite, 'effeminacy,' and pushes human beings forward on their progress from imperfections and limitations to human heaven. In a later text,[18] the argument is less enthusiastic and moves somewhat closer to a dialectical position: Schiller argues that liberty and *Kultur* are indivisible and dependent on each other but 'in their becoming' are difficult to combine: 'Only in Europe there are states that are at the same time enlightened, civilized and free [*zugleich erleuchtet*, *gesittet und ununterworfen*]; everywhere else savagery cohabits with liberty, and bondship

[Knechtschaft] with Kultur.' (Fisch 1992: 715) Schiller recognizes here the dialectic by which the progress of culture normally depends on the building of states based on Knechtschaft, i.e. the opposite of what culture seems to promise, while liberty can be had for free, as it were, in savagery or in the absence of civilization. Insight into the dialectic of enlightenment chases Schiller here, but he is just one step ahead of being caught by it: he narrowly avoids the critical conclusion that enlightenment developed in the sign of the hangman by stating that the dialectic somehow does not apply to Europe. Europe is especially, unambiguously lucky. Why this should be so, Schiller does not say.

A literary example of the proud invocation of culture and civilization against the old regime is Goethe's poem 'Prometheus.' In Goethe's realist, more materialist version of idealism, there is no dichotomy between culture and civilization: Prometheus, rebelliously addressing the Gods, references productive and self-sustaining work:

'But you can't touch my earth, my cabin that you did not build, my hearth whose glow you watch with envy.'[19]

In this imagery, culture is related back to the root meaning of the word, the *cultura* of the land, and contrasted to the God's precarious and exploitative dependence on 'altar gifts' granted by unenlightened and immature people. Prometheus also has a line on the form of *Kulturkritik* as permitted by the 'Gods' of the *ancien régime*:

'Did you, by chance, suppose
that I should hate life,
flee into deserts,
just because
not all the young boy's early morning flower-dreams
had come to pass?'

Prometheus is, like Guizot, a seasoned liberal who knows that the promise of civilization

takes its time to be delivered, and that asceticism won't help things along. Instead, he is committed to the long march of *Bildung*, the shaping of people's minds by education:

'I sit here, shaping men and women in my image'

In the meantime, Prometheus also appreciates that life is a mixture of suffering and enjoyment:

'to suffer and to cry, to savour joy, to laugh'

Rome was not built in a day; and quite a shlep it was.

This is also what David Quixano says in the final scene of Israel Zangwill's play of 1908, 'The Melting Pot': 'What is the glory of Rome and Jerusalem where all nations and races come to worship and look back, compared with the glory of America, where all races and nations come to labour and look forward!' (Zangwill 2006: 363) The Promethean spirit of hard-working, down-to-earth liberal utopianism-that-is-not-one is here identified as distinctly American. Zangwill celebrated progressive American civilization as an alternative to the orthodox Judaism of his father, a rabbi; another son of a rabbi, Horace Meyer Kallen, coined around the same time the equally famous phrase 'cultural pluralism,' which was meant to provide a less violent alternative to the metaphor of the 'melting pot' but suggested essentially the same idea: plural versus orthodox culture, based on a shared and progressing civilization (Jacoby 1999: 55; Niethammer 2000: 255-7; Ratner 1984).

The progress of modern civilization depended, and still depends, on that of the modern state. Throughout, the state has in many ways been necessary for creating a framework for the liberal reform of society, culture and civilization. Matthew Arnold famously emphasised that the reverse is also true: 'culture suggests the idea of *the State*. We find no basis for a firm State-power in our ordinary selves; culture suggests one to us in our *best self*.' (Arnold 1993: 99) Different from classical social contract theory, Arnold took account of the

observation often made that the benefits of delegating sovereignty away from individuals to the state are not always immediately apparent to every single individual. He argued therefore that 'the idea of the State' comes from what we could potentially be (our 'best self') rather than what we actually are (our 'ordinary self'). The state needs culture, but culture, if it wants to become processual, to cultivate, that is, to reform society effectively in the liberal sense, requires the state. If the state warrants identification, progress and order against anarchy (such as against the militant demonstrations for suffrage that took place while Arnold wrote *Culture and Anarchy*[20]), it can do so only because of every individual's longing for 'betterment': culture is defined in this context as the conscious striving towards progress or perfection. Looking at the specific historical context of the formulation of the liberal (normative) concept of culture makes clear that it also has a sociohistorically specific content. The normative idea of culture is hardly innocent but links to the development of state, nation and capitalism (Lloyd and Thomas 1998: 5). This conception of culture, representative of the main strand of classical liberalism from Schiller to Arnold, posits 'culture' as a human universal and a utopian, emancipatory potential. It is however at the same time put into the service of a specific particular, the national, capitalist state. This contradiction is central to the concept of culture and largely determines its development. Culture as occupying 'the space between the individual and the state, forming the citizen as ethical "best self" was in the nineteenth century fiercely contested by at least some working-class radicals (Lloyd and Thomas 1998: 10).

Taking up the Arnoldian theme, Edward Burnett Tylor concluded his famous book *Primitive Culture* (1871) with the suggestion that the study of culture should be regarded as 'a reformer's science,' the role of which is 'to expose the remains of the old crude culture which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction,' thereby aiding progress (Bennett 1998: 94). For Tylor, culture was on the one hand that much quoted 'complex whole' which he defined in words that are in fact opposite pairs: knowledge and belief, art and morals, law and custom—concepts which need to be unpacked and differentiated in the study of modern society, rather than, as Tylor does, wrapped up into a single concept. On the other hand, culture is for Tylor, as for Arnold, a means to reform people's way of life, that is, a means to *reform* and modernize culture—i.e. civilization. For Tylor, reform meant to destroy old culture rather than respect and conserve it, and to build

the true culture and civilization of progress. The often celebrated widening of the definition of culture in the 'anthropological' sense (the 'complex whole' which sociologists, before the 'cultural turn,' used to refer to as 'society,' of which 'culture' was then a distinct part) has here the function of extending the reach of liberal government and progressive reform (Ibid: 106). The vehicle and motor of such reform is of course the expansion of the capitalist mode of production. Whether one thinks of this modernization as a good or a bad thing: there's the rub. What is its actual content and meaning?

§

Does the strong, substantial individuality gain from capitalist civilization, or does it flourish better in the warm soil of a strictly particular culture? How much culture and how much civilization are best for bringing the pre-history of man to a happy ending and to begin the history of a humane, joyful and cooperative society? Are the noise-rock-producing eccentrics in the Welsh hills more the product of culture or of civilization? In other words, 'what have the Romans ever done for us?'

The question famously posed by Reg of the 'People's Front of Judea' has been answered, *mutatis mutandis*, in the *Communist Manifesto*:[21]

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. [...] it compels them to introduce so-called civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. (Marx 1976: 488)[22]

When civilization tears down protectionist walls, as the *Manifesto* suggests, it creates openings. Had Galileo been 'fully integrated' in 'his culture,' equipped with the kind of healthy and robust 'identity' that social engineers and police psychologists recommend we should all have, he would hardly have challenged an authority that was just as healthily rooted in that same 'culture.' (Malik 2005) Quite contrary to the classical Greek tragedians' view that the progress of wealth, society and material civilization inevitably leads to the corruption of morals and morality, eternally recycled by pessimistic 'cultural critique,' these

forces ('globalization') may have the potential to push humanity beyond itself to a humane state of things.

However, few cultures that would fit Tylor's definition exist anymore, as civilization has conquered all. The cultures that multiculturalism talks about are not cultures in the anthropological sense. In the wind-shadow of the triumph of civilization, the conceptual difference between culture and subculture has been silently abolished; subculture has swallowed culture and thrown off the 'sub-.' Jacoby writes that because 'the narrow idea of culture [...] often was implicitly or explicitly racist,' the 'elastic notion of culture' was socially useful (Jacoby 1999: 39). The problem with this concept is its vagueness. 'How can culture subsist apart from work and the production of wealth?' (Ibid) The anthropological concept of culture makes sense only if it is truly inclusive of *all* activities that constitute human life, i.e. if it does not bracket out 'economics' and 'politics' as separate spheres. A multi-culture of 'cultures' that share the same economic structure is no such thing. When 'culture' is not simply a synonym for 'society' (as is basically the case with the allencompassing, anthropological concept of culture), when 'culture' is differentiated from 'economics,' 'politics' and 'the social,' then the discussion of the relationships between 'different cultures' within the same state and society must pose the question: 'what does it mean if two different cultures partake of identical economic activities?' 'No divergent political or economic vision animates cultural diversity. From the most militant Afrocentrists to the most ardent feminists, all quarters subscribe to very similar beliefs about work, equality and success. The secret of cultural diversity is its political and economic uniformity.' (Ibid) Jacoby concludes, '[m]ulticulturalism is not the opposite of assimilation but its product' (Ibid: 49).

We live in the society that Zangwill envisaged. Uniformity has grown tremendously: 'Indeed, even before today's immigrants set foot on US soil, they are probably more American than previous generations of Americans.' (Malik 2005: 376) Only to the extent that all other differences have disappeared from the radar, ethnic diversity, especially the thin trickle that results from immigration, has grabbed all of the attention. The contemporary obsession with either fighting or celebrating ethnicity is a mechanism of compensation and displacement. There is no 'clash of civilizations,' just the stable last stage of the protracted

war of position between civilization on one side, cultures on the other. Two facts determine its outcome: neither can civilization be put back in the bottle nor can the cultures be abolished. Genocide, a hallmark of civilization in the twentieth century, was just that attempt, and failed. No side in this antagonism can win. Perhaps a combination of the worst aspects of either will prevail, a global triumph of ethnic provincialism based on intensely civilized exploitation. Perhaps, though, history can be reopened, cooled down and rebalanced.

The promise of culture can only be read off its givens, quite in the Hegelian sense that the general exists only in the form of the specific and particular. An emancipatory perspective, as in Critical Theory, needs to maintain and exploit the dialectical tension between both concepts. Culture as a promise must be defended, located and nurtured within the existing cultures. One must not take sides with either the progress of capitalist civilization nor the persistence of cultures as they exist—not only because this would be pointless, but more importantly because a more reasonable form of civilization or society will need to build on the better elements of both. While barbarism is not overcome but rather modernized by civilization, cultures are the medium of civilization as well as elements of resistance against it, in its barbaric as well as emancipatory aspects. A culture is a mixed set of incidental habits, customs, experience, prejudices, knowledge and superstitions. These are, though, the embodiments, or forms of appearance, of truth, morality and humanity, and the only such embodiments available: the latter do not materialize other than in the form of the former. The proposition of the Enlightenment, and likewise that of Critical Theory, is to relate to the former in ways that encourage them to yield the latter, in other words, to encourage the particular and the false to reveal the universal and the true, civility and humane-ness that are inherent in it as its potentialities and that constitute, perhaps, their truth. Where humanity is, humane-ness shall become. The value of cultural pluralism and the relativism that it entails is that only constellations of particular cultures can make universal truth appear. Only by nurturing, not by destroying *humanity-as-it-is* can *humane-ness-as-it-should-be* emerge: there is no other place for it to come from. The same is true for the movement that advocates that the human world become humane: it is located within but points beyond existing culture and civilization. Here is the good news that lies at the core of the negative dialectic: civilization still can deliver on the promise made by culture. 'Not the rationalization of the

world is to blame for the misery, but the irrationality of this rationalization'; the only remedy is 'the effort to drive civilization beyond itself.' (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research 1972: 94-5; Institut für Sozialforschung 1956: 87-8)

Notes

- [1.] This essay is a revised presentation given in March 2007 at The University of Delhi, Department of Germanic and Romance Studies. I am grateful to Shaswati Mazumdar for inviting and hosting me in its oddly wonderful environment.
- [2.] On the conceptual history of culture and civilization, see Fisch 1992, Frankfurt Institute for Social Research 1972, Williams 1988, Williams 1981 and Hartman 1997.
- [3.] The actual title is *De Origine et situ Germanorum*.
- [4.] Although published in English as 'Cultural Criticism and Society' (Adorno 1981), an alternative translation of the title could be 'The Critique of Civilization and Society.' The translation has been revised here from the original German (Adorno 1963) in a number of places without indication. *Prisms* also contains an essay on Oswald Spengler, of whose critique of civilization Adorno might be thinking here, as well as more generically the likes of Weber, Simmel and Nietzsche.
- [5.] Adorno does not use what is now typically referred to as the 'generic concept' of culture as the 'totality of a way of life,' which has by now become the third of three equally common meanings of the concept.
- [6.] 'Anweisung auf' is a rather strange choice of words here. Adorno may have been playing on the notion of a 'Zahlungsanweisung,' a deed or promissory note that entitles the holder to future payment.
- [7.] Raymond Williams stands only uncomfortably and partially in this tradition: in the problem of what to do with the concept of totality, the revolutionary and reactionary aspects of German idealism clash, and this clashing can be heard in all traditions of social thought that inherit elements of it. On the falseness of the notion that pre-capitalist wholeness ought to be regained, see Postone 1993 and Stoetzler 2005.
- [8.] The German word here is 'abgezogen,' which is a literal translation of the Latin 'abstractum'.
- [9.] I leave *Geist* un-translated as the concept famously draws some of its power from the

impossibility to pin down its meaning between spirit, intellect and mind. A prominent German nineteenth-century definition of *Geist* defines it as 'the law-governed development of inner activity.' (Kalmar 1987: 675) The definition is by Moritz Lazarus, one of the founders in Germany of what later would become cultural anthropology, a major influence on Franz Boas.

- [10.] This is a classic text of the resistance to emancipation, famously attacked by John Stewart Mill in the same journal the following year. Carlyle found political economy 'dismal,' it seems, because it precludes the notion of transcendence; in a sense, his was a right-wing critique of positivism.
- [11.] Marx often enough prioritized writing polemics against reactionary and conservative forms of socialism over advancing his research.
- [12.] Horkheimer and Adorno argue that logically as well as in historical analysis it is impossible to separate terror and enlightenment but suggest 'scorn[ing] logic if it is against humanity.' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1987: 248; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 180) [13.] This latter idea resembles the Christian, especially Protestant idea of unmediated relationship between the individual Christian and the Christian God, but also anticipates the Hitlerite notion of the *Führerprinzip* as the direct relationship between the individual *Volksgenosse* and the *Führer*.
- [14.] The passage actually reads 'I release the safety on my Browning,' quoted from Jacoby 1999: 34. The difference is of course that Fanon's 'native' feels for his (or her) knife in defence against an attack that experience teaches is to be expected to come together with 'Western culture,' while the Nazi pulls his (or her) gun in order to attack 'culture' proactively, paranoidly projecting his (or her) own violence onto a 'culture' (or civilization) that the Nazi *imagines* to be uprooting his (or her) world. In fact, the Nazi him/herself is the most violent exponent of that culture and civilization.
- [15.] '[N]ach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch, und das frisst auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben.' (Adorno 1963: 26) This is the last but one sentence of the essay.
- [16.] Fear of castration strikes again here, as above and so below.
- [17.] The passage taken from Schiller's 1784 essay 'On the Stage as Moral Institution.'
- [18.] This is from a historical essay on the 'migration of peoples,' the crusades and the Middle Ages first published in 1790.

[19.] The amended translation used here derives from the widely available Erich Harth version: 'Mußt mir meine Erde/Doch lassen stehn,/Und meine Hütte,/Die du nicht gebaut,/Und meinen Herd,/Um dessen Glut/Du mich beneidest.'

[20.] First published in 1869, Arnold refers in 'Culture and Anarchy' to the events surrounding the struggle for universal (male) suffrage in Britain in 1866-67, especially the tearing down of the railings that enclosed Hyde Park. The event was celebrated in the radical *Reynold's News*, on July 29th, 1866: 'The people have triumphed, in so far as they have vindicated their right to meet, speak, resolve, and exhort in Hyde-park. True, the gates were closed and guarded against them. They were not allowed to enter by the customary, the legal, and the constitutional way. But, then, they found out there were other ways than the legal, the constitutional and the customary way of effecting an entrance. Yes, the gates of Hyde-park were closed against them, and, lo! in twenty minutes after, Hyde-park all round was one vast, wide, gaping gate [...] By a long pull, a strong pull and a push all together, down went the iron railings and the stones in which they were fixed in hundreds of yards, so that in less time than it takes to tell the story, the iron barriers which excluded the people from Hyde-park were levelled to the ground, or inclined against the trees, for miles. Then the people poured in hundreds of thousands into the park and there, under the nose of Sir Richard Mayne and before the masses of the bludgeon-brigade, and though scarlet lines of Foot Guards and Life Guards, with bayonets fixed and sabres drawn were flanking the police, and ready to charge, a meeting was held.' Quoted in: 'The Battle for Hyde Park: ruffians, radicals and ravers, 1850s-1990s.'

[21.] C.f. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ozEZxOsanY

[22.] 'Die Bourgeoisie reißt durch die rasche Verbesserung aller Produktionsinstrumente, durch die unendlich erleichterten Kommunikationen alle, auch die barbarischsten Nationen in die Zivilisation. [...] Sie zwingt sie, die sogenannte Zivilisation bei sich selbst einzuführen, d.h. Bourgeois zu werden.' (Marx 1990: 466)

References

Adorno, T.W. (1963) 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', *Prismen, Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, dtv.

Adorno, T.W. (1981) 'Cultural Criticism and Society', *Prisms*, trans. S. and S. Weber, MIT Press.

Adorno, T.W. (2007) *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, Continuum.

Arnold, M. (1993) 'Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism 1867-9' [1869], *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press.

Bennett, T. (1998) Culture: A Reformer's Science, Sage.

Carlyle, T. (1849) 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, Vol. XL, 672,

.

Fanon, F. (1963) The Wretched of the Earth, trans. C. Farrington, Grove Weidenfeld.

Fisch, J. (1992) 'Zivilisation, Kultur', Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe Vol. 7.

Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (1972) *Aspects of Sociology*, Preface by M. Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno, trans. J. Viertel, Beacon Press.

Guizot, F. (1997) *The History of Civilization in Europe* [1828; 1847], trans. W. Hazlitt, Penguin.

Hartman, G. H. (1997) The Fateful Question of Culture, Columbia University Press.

Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. W. (1987) *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* [1947], Horkheimer, Max, *Gesammelte Schriften*, *Bd.* 5, Fischer.

Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. W. (2002) *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. E. Jephcott, Stanford University Press.

Institut für Sozialforschung (1956) *Institut für Sozialforschung, Soziologische Exkurse*, Europäische Verlagsanstalt.

Jacoby, R. (1999) *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy*, Basic Books.

Kalmar, I. (1987) 'The Völkerpsychologie of Lazarus and Steinthal and the Modern Concept of Culture', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48:4: 671-690.

Lloyd, D. and Thomas, P. (1998) *Culture and the State*, Routledge.

Malik, K. (2005) 'Making a Difference: Culture, Race and Social Policy', *Patterns of Prejudice* 39:4: 361-378.

Marx, K. (1976) 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' [1848], *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, *Vol. 6*, Progress Publishers.

Marx, K. (1990) 'Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei' [1848], *Marx-Engels-Werke Vol. 4*, Dietz.

Niethammer, L. (2000), *Kollektive Identität, Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur*, Rowohlt.

Postone, M. (1993) *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge University Press.

Ratner, S. (1984) 'Horace M. Kallen and Cultural Pluralism', *Modern Judaism* 4: 185-200.

Stoetzler, M. (2005) 'On How to Make Adorno Scream: Some Notes on John Holloway's Change the World Without Taking Power', *Historical Materialism* 13:4: 193-215.

Williams, R. (1981) Culture, Fontana.

Williams, R. (1988) Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, Fontana.

Wolf, E.R. (1994) 'Perilous Ideas, Race, Culture, People,' Current Anthropology 35:1: 1-12.

Zangwill, I. (2006) *From the Ghetto to the Melting Pot: Israel Zangwill's Jewish Plays*, Wayne State University Press.

On Dosing Culture

Chris Crawford

The overdevelopment of the division of labor in society lives on the immaturity of the ruled. The more complex and sensitive the social, economic, and scientific mechanism, to the operation of which the system of production has long since attuned the body, the more impoverished are the experiences of which the body is capable. The elimination of qualities, their conversion into functions, is transferred by rationalized modes of work to the human capacity for experience, which tends to revert to that of amphibians. The regression of the masses today lies in their inability to hear with their own ears what has not already been heard, to touch with their hands what has not previously been grasped; it is the new form of blindness which supersedes that of vanquished myth.

- Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment
- "Thoughts are a nuisance," said one of my patients. "I don't want them."
- Wilfred Bion, *Learning From Experience*

Preliminaries

The following essay concerns transformations to the cultural sphere rooted in the rise of digital culture. From a common sense perspective, digital culture is conceived in a narrow way—as one type of culture within the consumer landscape—and the sphere of culture in general is simply one area of behavior alongside others, though less significant than structures like economics or politics.

The main concern is what this regime, which will come under the heading of 'dosing culture,' does to aesthetic experience. What follows will be of some interest only to those who believe culture has a meaningful, though mediated, relationship to broader social structures, which in turn determine the kinds of people we can become, the kind of world

we can imagine, the kind of relationships we can have, the kind of behavior we observe, and the kind of psyches that are dominant in a given era. That is, the following assumes that dominant aesthetic regimes, mediated by social forces and technology, are more than a limited sphere of 'consumption' taking place on an individualist basis.

There is a growing relevance of cultural products which systematically and intentionally impoverish and regiment experience. The case for the structural role of culture is even easier to make with regard to digital culture, as its purveyors have in a matter of a few years become some of the most profitable and thus powerful megacorporations in all of global capitalism. If Adorno and Horkheimer hedged the importance of the culture industry by highlighting its dependence on other major industries like chemicals, electronics and military production, this qualification is no longer valid. These industries are fantastically powerful in objective, economic terms.

While it is assumed that there are broad and powerful structures in society that systematically shape experience and mental life, what follows mostly concerns the questions of *how* and *why*. Developing precise typologies of digital culture will not be a major concern. Certain overarching characteristics and tendencies will be outlined, but there will not be much effort placed toward concrete categorization. The reason is because what truly matters – the psychological and social tendencies they embody in people over time – are shared across superficial differences. Differences are in some sense already 'within' the ideology and structures under critique. Culture today depends on constant change, constant new development, innovation and technologies. It has to instill in us the feeling that things are truly new and that we truly need them. This tendency toward *pseudo-differentiation* has been at the heart of the culture industry since its inception.

While most of what is described below will seem to apply most concretely to digital or online culture and 'social media' in particular, important developments worthy of reflection, the tendencies described will not for that reason be restricted to these forms. The groundwork and unifying aspects of digital culture have been laid for decades now. For that reason, the tendencies outlined here can best be understood not as an abandonment of the twentieth century critique of the culture industry but its continuation. The focus on general

tendencies and structures does not imply that comparative research is not useful, and hopefully the fundamental structures might provide a groundwork to be filled in, verified or contradicted by narrower examinations in the future.

Part One: Tendencies of Dosing Culture

Sublimation, Diversion and Dissociation

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud discusses various defenses, or 'techniques of life,' which human beings have developed to contravene our unhappiness. For Freud, discontent is inevitable. Civilization requires the repression of our congenital tendency toward unbridled pleasure seeking, and pleasure is our only source of happiness. Culture is considered from two basic perspectives in his discussion. The first is as a diversion. Culture provides momentary sensual pleasure, a release from the pressures of reality. Freud compares culture as diversion to the use of 'chemical substances,' found in one form or another in every society, which regulate emotional economies, promote cohesion and suppress dissent.

Freud subsumes the second perspective on culture, together with art, science and philosophy, under the heading of 'sublimation.' Sublimation is another form of diversion, but a deeper and more lasting one. It is a displacement of the drives, as opposed to a mere distraction or pseudo-satisfaction, into higher yet less intense forms of pleasure. It is as if through sublimation a substance normally toxic in its pure form is able to combine with something from the outside world. In the process, it becomes a safer compound. Neither diversion nor sublimation solve our fundamentally problematic existence as pleasure fiends in the wrong world, but the latter at least contributes to a strengthening of the self over time.

It is to Freud's credit that he refuses to restrict culture to sublimation alone, making sure not to neglect the 'lower' forms that are equally important in our psychic and social economy. This is important for any contemporary study of culture because today, sublimation as a cultural outlet is increasingly supplanted by diversion, which infects even those areas previously believed to be bastions of serious pursuits. What we often get from culture now

can only be called an 'experience' by stretching the meaning of the term. It is too impoverished even for that abstract criteria. It is more like an endless series of doses.

We can recognize this in the transformation of the word itself. Culture is just as likely to signify YouTube videos, live streams, podcasts, tweets, serialized TV, Twitch streams, pop songs, shareable content on platforms like Instagram or TikTok, and corporate narrative franchises as the history of literature, religion and ritual, or visual art. We often speak now simply of 'media,' an elision that seems to hit upon something objective: the relationship of objects of culture to cultivation has been liquidated, replaced by marketing, algorithmic standardization, commodification, and pseudo-personalization. It is now a cycle of 'content production' and mindless consumption.

Cultural objects within capitalism have always been commodities, and as such they are underpinned by economic imperatives and forms of technology that, by serving these imperatives, shape art's inner qualities and modes of reception. As commodities that are meant to capture our minds, they also have the power, compounded over time, to structure our desires and determine the limits of our experience, our modes of thought, and our capacities for reflection. Put simply, they begin to change what it means to be a subject just as religion, which it has replaced, once did.

Culture now comes at us in an endless stream. Our task is not interpretation, but simply to prepare ourselves to consume more without digesting anything. To aid this effortless internalization, content becomes smooth, rigid and textureless, and it just keeps coming. The process of consumption, ceaseless as it is, must be made so habitual and frictionless that nothing can possibly stick. Culture no longer cultivates. It is not meant to. The objects foisted upon us no longer allow for that kind of engagement.

Dosing culture is merely the latest iteration of the culture industry, which long ago supplanted sublimation culture as the latter's social, institutional and intellectual foundations eroded. In the American case, so-called elite culture has always been restricted to a small minority. In many respects, dosing culture is simply an intensification of the tendencies of standardization, pseudo-personalization and psychological regimentation that

have been hallmarks of mass culture since its beginning.

Because labor-power in capitalism is a commodity, our mental, emotional and bodily lives are commodified through work. In a basic sense, while we are at work we are no longer in possession of ourselves. Around the midcentury, theorists like C. Wright Mills and Harry Braverman highlighted the specific psychological effects of this regimentation, which never applied strictly bodies but also to our minds, our psychologies, our inner behavior, our self-concepts. The Frankfurt School brought to these topics the recognition that the logic of subsumption is not restricted to our time at work. The culture industry was thus theorized as the sphere of extensions of commercial imperatives into free time.

Has digital culture altered this logic in any way, or has it simply intensified it? Dosing culture is clearly a continuation of the ideological functions of mass culture: reification and psychological integration remain primary; to instill the feeling that the world cannot possibly be other than it is. But it is possible that dosing culture achieves this aim in new ways, which might be significant for any contemporary theory of subjectivity.

How should we outline this development? If traditional 'bourgeois culture' (at least in theory) was built for sublimation, and early forms of analog mass culture replaced sublimation with diversion, dosing culture can perhaps be said to have gone a step further and developed a total cultural system of dissociation. Or, as it has been put elsewhere, the history of the culture industry, believed by the theorists of the Frankfurt School to have been powerful enough to fundamentally change subjectivity in modern society, is the history of the transformation of "neurotic subjects into properly psychotic ones. Rather than drives and emotions pressing forth from the inside, drives and emotions are cut off from oneself and participate in the construction of a claustrophobic and paranoid reality surrounding us, so that emotional life and reality become so fused as to become indistinguishable" (Fong 2019).

Dosing culture is a system built to elicit psychotic-like mental functioning, tendentially cutting us off from reality and liquidating our capacities for thought. What dosing culture manages, as a total cultural system, is to replace older forms of aesthetic engagement, even

the relatively superficial ones of analog mass culture, with a total psychotic system, a constant flow of undigested objects, an inescapable, claustrophobic loop of integration.

The symptoms are numerous: the sense of timelessness and lack of development; the transition from boredom to manic activity, or in some cases their combination in a single activity; the suffusion of consciousness with a sense of sterility and stasis despite the constant flow of new content; the constant sense of distraction or pseudo-engagement—all these qualities articulate the general sense of a culture that is cut off from our inner depths even as it manages to dominate consciousness, insinuating itself into daily behavior, prevalent attitudes and mental functioning during our free time and at work.

This change has a number of social, political and psychological ramifications. In psychological terms contemporary culture, even more so than older forms of mass culture, requires the subsumption of our experiential awareness and mental functioning to industrial technology, leading to manifestly negative psychological outcomes. The rise of TV and radio in the twentieth century certainly led to widespread conventionalism, but digital culture literally makes people ill—anxious, depressed, paranoid. Almost all of its qualities follow from its tendency to liquidate our capacity for complex thought, to replace reality contact with projection, paranoia and mania.

I will describe dosing culture's psychotic tendencies in greater detail below, but for now it is worth briefly mentioning two of its most important political ramifications. In psychotic life, nothing develops. The sense of time atrophies (Kernberg 2008). Digital culture spoils both our capacity for historical experience as well as our ability to feel in art the sense that another world is possible. Authentic art throughout history has served as a container for the collective longing for a world not based in domination. This element disappears in dosing culture. The culture industry was always 'positivist,' made up of forms, contents and images that largely refuse to go beyond the status quo. Dosing culture works by further severing the link between aesthetic experience and non-standard experience.

This is achieved in formal terms through the destruction of relationships which previously made meaning and development possible: the relationships inside an artwork itself; the

reciprocal relationship between the work's development and the subject's development, which extends to the relationship between aesthetic competence and psychological maturity; and finally, perhaps most importantly, the relationship between the work and historical meaning. Dosing culture simply does not allow for any meaningful sense of time. Its dissociative tendencies promote historical amnesia to an extreme degree. Our minds tend to shut off as we consume it, to the point where what has happened even the day before disappears from awareness.

This process of formal flattening is made possible by extreme forms of technical regimentation. Not only does dosing consist mostly of impoverished contents ripped from everyday life, but in formal terms it is a product of severing the tie between form and content, technique and inner development. Form is replaced by the proprietary technology of the platform, software that controls into the minutest detail how you produce, share and experience work, and algorithms that constantly filter what you are able to see. Spontaneity is replaced by platform and algorithm-based management, idiotic imitative behavior and extreme forms of conventionalism. In short, subjects and their mental life become appendages to the technology.

This gets us to the core of dosing cultural-economic innovation. Dosing culture takes the traditional logic of commodified culture and adds another layer of commercial exploitation. The traditional critique of the culture industry focused on the way production 'from above' engendered a false sense of freedom or 'consumer choice' that disguised the way it shaped, down to the smallest detail, through processes of standardization and marketing, our capacities for experience, our fantasy worlds and psychological attitudes. The culture industry constantly hijacked our desires, our sense of identity, our emotional and fantasy worlds for the sake of profit. Contemporary dosing culture does that and more. It not only markets cultural commodities to consumers, but in the very same process constitutes the consumers as a further commodity to sell back to companies. In its modes of reception, mediated by software, algorithms and massive data systems, it transforms the customers *themselves* into a commodity, a consumer-identity matrix that can be sold to firms for targeted ads. This absolutely mundane function is, in the final analysis, the new godhead of our culture. The contemporary culture industry as it plays out in dosing culture thus

becomes a sort of mobius strip of commodification, a total system of exploitation on every side.

Finally, culture's conventionalizing tendencies do not exhaust its ideological role. The power of this system grows in direct proportion to our powerlessness in all other areas over the course of our lives and society at large. People perpetually at the mercy of structures beyond their control retreat into culture and its illusions of agency. Over time, it becomes a mental prosthetic, a pacifier we constantly utilize to soothe our depression, to provide some continuity amidst our fragmentation, or just to make life tolerable at all.

From Cultivation to Infantilism

In order to more fully understand where we are today, let us begin with a comparison. The genre of the *Bildungsroman* implies an idea of youth wherein early encounters with certain works of art are so powerful that they contribute to one's identity and shape the trajectory of one's life. This might seem like an old romantic idea, but it is hard to argue against the notion that choosing to read Proust or Joyce intensively at a certain age, or becoming deeply familiar with some particular style from art history, or going through the canon of modern music – that these experiences, which probably occupy many of us for years, actually make us different people. Or, if that is too strong, perhaps we might put it passively: after you encounter them, you are no longer the same.

This notion of aesthetic experience is powerful because it initiates a journey that requires effort and transformation. Reading great literature not only adds something to the self. It also produces the possibility of going beyond oneself, of making one's way through the object to a position of autonomy and distanced reflection—not only from the work in question but also one's own assumptions and dominant attitudes. What makes, say, an early attachment to Nietzsche different from an addiction to the empty yet interminable thought-husks that populate Twitter—the platform of thought in-its-appearance—is that his thinking contains the injunction to go beyond it, to think for oneself, to eventually put his influence in its proper place.

This is an idea of culture that contains the notion of development, personal change, maturity and cultivation. It emerged from the enlightenment tradition and contains its basic directive as outlined by Kant: the courage to think for oneself, to escape from self-imposed immaturity. In a world in which culture is built to make people empty and endlessly suggestible, an alternative would be an idea of experience that actually contributes to our basic sense of having an 'inside' that we can carry with us from moment to moment, in the same way that Nabokov once said he would never go back to Russia because "all of the Russia that I need is always with me. Literature, language, and my own Russian childhood." (Nabokov 1962)

Today this entire model has been reversed. These activities are now considered the purview of snobs and elitists. You are made to feel guilty by engaging in them. Far from being associated with radical subjectivity, these pursuits are now considered by many on the so-called left as reactionary, racist, elitist in themselves. The culture that was originally considered reactionary—that of commodified culture and the conventionalism it inscribed in people—is now the exclusive realm of freedom. No one seems to notice how nicely this ideologically transformation has worked out for those in power and the firms that reduce all experience to commerce.

Cultural experience is no longer a personal journey of transformation but an endless stream of the ever-same that neither helps us develop nor inculcates in us a sense of discernment—a potential for both unprejudiced dissatisfaction and "the search for a difficult pleasure" (Bloom 2001: 29). Contemporary culture tires to ensure that we *do not* develop or change. One of the most conspicuous features not only of dosing culture but of contemporary culture as a whole is the sense that it is suffused, in both form and content, in overt and subtle ways, with infantilizing or adolescent qualities. The ways it is produced and circulated are determined by the end goal of making us dependent; little babies in need of the ding of a new notification, a Tweet, a message and all the other substitutes for the long lost gaze from our mother. Its goal is to breed identification, attachment and addiction, not a new sense of reality. It tells us nothing of substance about history, life, human nature or psychology, and traffics almost strictly in clichés and memes. It is positivist, a symptom of atrophied imagination.

These infantilizing qualities have their origin in economic imperatives. The most important factor is our integration into a community of consumers. Early tastes are important because they will determine our consumption patterns later on. Harold Bloom argued that we ultimately read in order to strengthen the self, and "to learn its authentic interests" (Ibid: 21). All reading, even at the highest levels, will be colored by the desire to recapture the pleasures we experienced in youth. We read to understand ourselves more deeply, to understand the world, to experience a sense of other people and human history. We read as a cure for alienation. Today we are lucky if we can ever escape the aesthetic comportment of our early years. Our childhood becomes a trap, precisely because childhood itself is so intensively commodified today. If culture as sublimation builds our ego up, the new style works to destroy whatever ego remains. Because we are a 'target audience,' the market dictates that we can never really mature. Our best hope is that someday we manage to morph into a new demographic. We are given the freedom to move from being twentysomethings who play video games and watch superhero movies to thirty-somethings who play video games and watch classic sitcoms. Perpetually underdeveloped, "reading falls apart, and much of the self scatters with it" (Ibid: 23).

New Conditions of Production and Reception

Like all other commodities, a change in function of cultural objects shapes the various modes of consumption. Culture is now something you microdose, like the new white collar workers who take psychedelics to get through an overloaded work week. The tendency is to provoke addiction. You're meant to get a shot of it, to get it coursing through your system so that you can relax, focus or simply feel anything at all. We use it to fill up the emptiness of time and existence, to help us turn off after the work day or to get us through it in the first place.

Dosing culture exposes a connection between needing to make sure the market, which is ultimately made up of our minds and emotional lives, is always ready for more, and the kinds and qualities of aesthetic products that are now prevalent. The function of the objects as attention commodities shapes the rest of their attributes. Huge swathes of culture today

are just technologies organized around ceaseless, interminable, addiction-like dosing. This goal exhausts both their form and content.

Adorno long ago emphasized that quantity replaces quality as art is infused with the capitalist principle of exchange above all else. With dosing culture, the synthesis of the object with the exchange principle hits a new pitch. It becomes autonomous even from any immediate economic imperative. Things are made to become 'viral' for their own sake, and 'virality' is built into the way they are made. The objects challenge us not in terms of quality, that we rise to the task of meeting formal demands and layered meaning, but in terms of sheer quantity. They ask not what we can manage in experiential complexity, but simply whether we can keep up.

Individual works are constructed to fit into a totality that we can never escape, and the totality begins to shape particulars to their core. Artists consider how to shape their 'content' in such a way that it moves seamlessly from one platform to another. They work to make sure the 'hook' in their song is short and powerful enough to transition between YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok. Television writers now construct whole scenes around 'gifable' moments to be endlessly shared online. The platforms where circulation takes place are designed to trap us, to importune us, to constantly disturb us back into cross-eyed consumption.

The shift from layered engagement to dissociative dosing, being a part of general tendencies within capitalism, has a material explanation. Today, artists sense that they should never make their 'content' too filling or rich. Otherwise you wouldn't be able to keep consuming it. Amateur production rises in importance. Some people are now more likely to watch an hour-long stream on YouTube in which nothing happens or a podcast about nothing in particular than to read a novel or watch a film, which requires attention over time. This has given way to a new ideology of freedom within a total sphere of domination. Anyone can go viral at any moment, anyone can break in simply by adding more content to the platform. The sense of openness hides the thoroughgoing conventionalism that is required in order to participate.

Many people now profess that they are simply no longer able to read or watch a film in its entirety, so habituated are they to constantly taking in content in small doses. Capturing the meaning of a traditional work requires thinking back and forth between events and holding the parts in one's mind over time. This has grown increasingly difficult. Reading like this requires what Bloom called a capacity for irony, which "demands a certain attention span, and the ability to sustain antithetical ideas, even when they collide with one another. Strip irony away from reading, and it loses at once all discipline and all surprise" (Ibid: 27). Dosing culture rebels against this kind of engagement at the most basic building blocks of form.

Notions of Content

The move from sublimation to dissociation culture has made its way into the language we use to describe artists, or in contemporary jargon, 'content creators.' All mass culture since its inception has been mediated by the profit motive, and, by extension, the division of labor, specialization, creation by committee, etc. Dosing culture today, though, often takes the form on the one hand of a platform mediated patronage model, and on the other an extension of advertising into everyday life in ever more nuanced ways. Ostensibly independent creators are no longer tied to a single firm or even a single medium of expertise. They work independently, creating content for different platforms. They must create their own audience of followers first before they will be taken up by larger concerns. The nexus of authority and control today is the total domination of consumption and production by the tyranny of the platform (and, by extension, various forms of software and automation and the companies that own them). 'Influencers' commodify their very existence, their personalities, their everyday life to an extreme degree. One 'follows' them only to be subjected to a vision of everyday life that is seamlessly interspersed with advertisements for products, to the point where the two become indistinguishable.

Expertise is increasingly irrelevant, and technical skill is less important than being marketable as a personality. Content creators think of their tasks as inherently networked. One has to build a following at all costs so that your 'fans' can be monetized. A content creator might start as a Twitter comedian, podcaster or YouTube star, but eventually they get

into writing, advertising, TV, major label music production. The very idea of creativity has changed. It has become serialized, repetitive, networked and reduced to a total process. The shift to content creation fits the ideology of the post-industrialized, networked regime of production, reception and circulation. Regardless of an artist's movement between fields, this regime tries to hide the fact that what lies behind it is toil and precarity. One must never allow this fact to infect the products themselves, and some platforms even use algorithms to censor out 'negative' content. This is perhaps also why contemporary culture is so infused with a constant swing from manic ecstasy to open-eyed nihilism, wearing its indifference to quality and significance on its face.

The new idea of content might be illuminated through a comparison. German philosophy drew a distinction between two words for 'content' in aesthetic theory—*Inhalt* and *Gehalt*—and this distinction touches on a key to the difference between culture as dosing versus sublimation. Content as *Inhalt* simply means what is being depicted or expressed. It is the information, subject matter or piece of reality that we find represented in a work of art. *Gehalt*, on the other hand, is content as 'import,' 'meaning,' or 'substance.' Hegel points out that judgments of artistic quality or truth, if they are to be saved from tautology, must depend not only upon what is being expressed—for instance, 'X is a great work because it depicts God, heroic people, brave actions, the ideal human form, etc.'—but whether or not the *how* of expression and form is correct for the *what*. This combination of the *how* with the *what* (whether harmonious, discordant, etc.) is what Hegel refers to as *Gehalt*. The way something is treated, displayed and depicted is what results in its meaning, import or 'aesthetic truth.'

This might sound so obvious as to be unworthy of comment, and it is true that these considerations were once tantamount to artistic initiative in its most minimal sense. Art was the result of whatever alchemy of form and content the artist could muster, whether applied from outside by rules or convention or from inside the work itself and the needs of its autonomous development. This is what gave birth to meaning. Today even this bar has become too high for large swathes of culture. It is important to consider these concepts now only because works that are made with the idea of *Gehalt* in mind allow for a kind of experience that is irreducible to the regime of endless dosing.

The idea of experience that comes through a communion with the *Gehalt* of a work is closely connected to another enlightenment notion, that of communicable, universal experience expressed in a singular work. This is to be distinguished from networked, mandated 'sharing,' which implies the standardization of that which is shared. Rather, the universal in the singular stands as proof that human beings are still willing and capable of expressing meaning through art that points, even negatively, to the possibility of a truly human world. We go out looking for such works because, in the words of Emerson, they 'impress us with the conviction that one nature wrote and the same reads,' that in aesthetic experience there is a momentary cure for alienation. "We read the verses of one of the great English poets, of Chaucer, of Marvell, of Dryden, with the most modern joy—with a pleasure, I mean, which is in great part caused by the abstraction of all time from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul" (Ibid: 7). The artist feels that the object is other to them even as they have created it, that they have in some sense discovered something that was there and couldn't be any other way, that they 'follow the marble where it wants to go,' to summarize a point made by Michelangelo. On the side of reception, this is the kind of object that has the capacity to move us in a way that is both socially shared and private.

This idea of content as a dynamic relation between subject and form, and the related ideas about artistic universality, often lead to what are now politically incorrect questions about aesthetic quality. Comparing one work to another to arrive at a judgment of quality is now considered improper. We are uncomfortable with questions of quality in art, and prefer that everyone be allowed to consume whatever they want. We rarely question whether or not what we say makes us happy actually does so, or what is gained in the process. But questions of artistic success, which are determined in part by whether or how a work or artist manages to speak to us from the past, have not gone away. The *Inhalt* of Kafka's oeuvre, for example, cannot be separated from the depiction of the rise of cities and bureaucracies near the birth of modern capitalist life. But the *Gehalt* of his work—the way he makes you feel terror at the fact that rational institutions (the family, work, bureaucracies, etc.) prepare us for a life of desperate unfreedom—is something that opens up to us only

through the way that he treats or expresses these themes, his method of generating shocks. It is now part of his work's truth content.

Purgatory

The cultural regime of the current moment is Kafka-esque only insofar as we experience it as a purgatory with no sense of time, development or escape. In dosing culture, a creator's treatment of a subject, the way they choose to solve artistic problems, does not extend from reflection on the material and its potential at a given moment but is determined by the platforms and geared toward imitation of trends. Works have become leveled, meme-like and oppressively monotonous. Our physical spaces have been infused with the same idiotic songs for decades now. The same cultural styles return again and again. Movies are in large part cannibalized versions of 'intellectual property' (IP) or remakes that will continue to be remade year after year, decade after decade. Dosing culture requires this timeless, prepackaged content. It conjures the feeling of release as inseparable from addiction and dependency, as an endless flow of trash that we imbibe without ever reaching satisfaction, and without ever going anywhere. The social media-induced delusion known as 'FOMO' (fear of missing out) perfectly expresses this contradiction: no matter how rare we know authentic experience to be, how aware we are that our spheres of communication are composed of endless heaps of the same with no way of escape and no real sense of satisfaction, we nevertheless cannot get rid of the belief that happiness is possible, and that other people are having it. 'There is hope, but not for us.' People are happy, we're sure of it. Only we never are.

Culture atrophies not only from an internal law of exhaustion, a 'death drive' of modernism, and not only because it is emptied out and reduced to exchange, but also because capitalist society has become a black hole, a snake eating its tail, a man-made catastrophe which lumbers on like a force of nature. Dosing culture's formal impoverishment is connected to contemporary life's general historical amnesia. It is culture that is built to step into the void of our own powerlessness over the course of the world. Culture in its domain is no longer the dream of something better, nor the illumination of the ugly truth of our contradictory nature. It is simply a sigh: 'Well, we have to have something.'

The connection between dosing and objective powerlessness, the sense of inevitability that typifies contemporary life, is perhaps most perfectly expressed in those areas that previously held at least some semblance of a relationship to 'reality.' News media and journalism in general have become a non-stop parade of mania and psychosis. In many respects, these areas are now merely an extension of dosing platforms like Twitter. News cycles get shorter and shorter. The institutions of information not only endlessly propagandize, whipping up scandals out of thin air, but also block digestion through the psychotic way in which they communicate stories. The field that previously prided itself on objectively seeking out facts despite its relationship to power now barely even bothers itself with the pretense of being anything other than hysteria and elite opinionating. Whole staffs of reporters are gutted to fund overpaid op-ed writers with no expertise to speak of and underpaid writers churning out as much content as they can manage. Not only do major outlets manufacture consent in the straightforward way first outlined by Chomsky and Herman, basically repeating the narratives that have been provided by the state and powerful actors in the economy. This method was mostly a question of content, not style. Today, the manner in which information is communicated is equally important. The goal is not merely to report, but to do so in a way that drums up a daily moral panic that intentionally prevents reflection on the part of the audience. The very form the news takes is psychotic. It constantly shifts from one thing to another with no consistency at all. Each day's moral panic is treated as if the entire world hangs in the balance, and every outlet squeezes as much attention as they possibly can until all of a sudden the item is dropped as if it never happened. Near total amnesia is mixed with ceaseless anxiety. Nothing ever changes, nothing is improved, and the catastrophes keep piling up.

The public sphere is now a mind warping economy of 'takes,' half-baked opinions to be used as battering sticks or projected onto others. That someone might actually have real knowledge, or that inquiry could be something undertaken in a collective, mutually beneficial way, are notions most would never even bother to entertain. The entire public sphere has been reduced to a giant comment section. The minute something is published an army emerges to air grievances, often without having read the piece in question. In the sphere of psychotic reception, response is more important than understanding, and mania

and hyperbole prevail here as well. You cannot simply disagree with something, rather you must protest against the very existence of the thing you disagree with, which is offensive, horrible, an act of violence. Emotion overtakes intellect almost as a rule, and the result is that no one ever learns anything. This not only results in a destruction of our capacity for thinking, but our ability to actually solve problems that are essential to our survival.

Pseudo-Democracy and the Endless Con

The final stage might already be on the horizon, as culture moves from being planned and organized by massive industries with gatekeepers who develop stables of talent to a situation of total automation and algorithmic control. If *Barton Fink* satirizes the collapse of the artist into the hired lackey during the golden age of mass culture, the 'content creator' signals the collapse of the hired employee into the endlessly hustling amateur constantly hawking his wares through the algorithm.

A recent signal of this shift was when Amazon decided to 'get into content' by trying to crowdsource workable scripts for its new production wing, a plan that obviously ended in failure. But the idea is clear. We have moved from guys in suits hiring, developing and marketing talent to guys in blue jeans and Patagonia vests who replace the costly middleman of artists and expertise with coders and feedback loops of makers and consumers. Neither side is allowed to outrun or outsmart the other because, at the end of the day, they are the same people. This final regime requires acclimating people not to expertly crafted kitsch but to manifestly empty trash they nevertheless become addicted to insofar as the 'schema' of their understanding—that mysterious process inside the mind which Kant believed underpinned all experience—is slowly replaced with elegant code.

This combination of lowered standards and algorithmic logic is the idea behind one of the fastest growing dosing culture platforms: TikTok. TikTok capitalizes on the identity of maker and consumer and combines it with a near total conditioning of attention by the despotism of algorithmic management. When you join its first goal is not only to get you addicted to consuming short bursts of content. It also has to prepare you to produce and share your own. This last bit is made more acceptable through the intervention of endless

filters and ornaments that make you look like a less hideous version of yourself. The screen is constantly glowing and softening up faces, a technologically advanced version of the soft focus previously used in classical Hollywood movies. Consuming, producing and sharing become part of a single process. This circle of producer and fan is a stroke of late capitalist genius. TikTok has realized that the addictive chemicals released in the brain should be exploited on both sides of the cultural exchange—not only consuming images and signs but also producing and sharing them, receiving recognition and a false sense of agency.

This pseudo-democratic element has led to forms of grift that now seem to be endemic to human relationships under the current cultural regime. So called 'stars' of the platform make money through coaxing 'fans' to give donations dressed up in little character icons. In exchange, the donor is promised shout-outs to grow their audience, future collaborations ('give me \$300 and we can sing a duet together') or just a fleeting moment of attention. This makes 'content creation' synonymous with smarmy, fawning, shameless and stupid behavior, and it reduces aesthetic reception to the most naked transactional relationship possible.

It might seem absurd to compare a social media app that is openly marketed as empty, ceaseless consumption with higher notions of culture. But the contrast allows us to get some analytical distance from forms which have become so routinized as to feel like second nature. Their whole orientation is to make us feel like it cannot be any other way.

If there is any light at the end of this tunnel, it might be contained in the openness with which this cultural regime acknowledges its own emptiness. As Jia Tolentino put it in her review of TikTok, "it is refreshing to go on a social media app that doesn't make you pretend you're on the internet for a good reason." (Tolentino 2019: 37) This might be true, but it is also difficult to imagine a lower bar for cultural criticism.

There is no longer any attempt to hide the fact that the images and sounds we consume are an endless con, that it's all just garbage, that the commodities we constantly shoot ourselves up with to enrich our lives never deliver us from the gnawing sense of meaninglessness. The result is the thoroughgoing infection of cultural life with irony, even if the irony has also

become so stultified that it no longer stings. The next generation of consumers is already upon us, and it is no surprise that many of them voice concerns about the anxiety they feel from tech addictions that make them feel hollow and bad. There is probably no other solution but to simply log off. We already know we are not missing anything. Perhaps we will eventually find the courage to know what we already know, to return to that most fundamental role of art. Or, as Robert Hullot-Kentor once put it: to consider how art allows reality "*break in on the mind that masters it,*" perhaps one of our only methods of escape. (Hullot-Kentor 2008)

Part Two: Art and the Capacity to Think – On the Underlying Psychology of Dosing Culture

The preceding sketch is not meant to be exhaustive or definitive. Rather, the goal has been to establish basic points of reference to make sense of prevalent forms of contemporary social psychology that are shaped by these objects and systems. Now we turn to the underlying psychology.

The integrative force of dosing culture occurs along two axes: by inhibiting thought and by disrupting our will to improve the world through non-pathological human relationships. Dosing culture prevents reflection and hijacks our instinctual life, our emotional needs, our libidinal attachments. The following concerns the details of the pathologies of mind and will unleashed by the contemporary system of technological culture. In reality, these two dimensions cannot be distinguished, but are part of the same process. The distinction is for analytic purposes only.

Section A: Pathologies of Thought

Historical Genesis of Contemporary Subjectivity

Dosing culture has become so naturalized that it is difficult to gain adequate interpretive distance. It is hard to imagine things being any different. Scrolling, posting, liking and swiping have all been made second nature. The difficulty of defamiliarization necessary for

a proper analysis is even more jarring given that dosing culture's hold on us is relatively recent.

Some historiography of contemporary subjectivity is needed, a look back at the descriptions of the psyche in late capitalism that have delivered us to this point. While dosing culture in the particular forms that envelop us today are new, the psychology that underlies them has been in development for decades. From David Reisman's theory of the 'Lonely Crowd,' to C. Wright Mill's description of the 'competitive personality,' to Adorno's hypothesis of a 'new type of human being' and its corresponding theory of *Halbbildung*, translated as 'pseudo-culture' or 'pseudo-cultivation' – all contain insights that might help us pinpoint the underlying psychology of dosing culture.

What all these theories have in common is a departure from certain elements of Freud's description of the 'neurotic' subject prevalent at the height of capitalist modernity. Developments in social and cultural life, stemming from changes in the life world of capitalism, have resulted in new tendencies in psychic structure. Adorno's theory of the 'new type of human being' and many elements of his description of the culture industry, though they never abandon Freudian terminology, often seem to delineate tendencies that would become central to concurrent developments in post-Freudian object relations theory. These theories shift emphasis away from sublimation and repression to dissociation and psychosis, what Wilfred Bion describes as a subject who cannot "learn from experience."

In psychological terms, dosing culture's fundamental tendency is to prevent any mixing of cultural objects with reflection, and by extension to cut off the realm of art from any relationship to a collective will for a better world. The rest of its qualities can be interpreted as stemming from this destruction of the capacity to think and imagine, or really to do anything other than project and identify with a distorted, impoverished status quo.

Bion's theorization of mental life underwent many changes throughout his life, but there is a basic theory that underlies them, summarized by Thomas Ogden:

"The way the mind works for Bion centrally involves α -function—the function of

transforming raw sensory data (termed β -elements) into units of meaningful experience (α -elements), which can be linked in the process of thinking and stored as memory. For Bion, dreaming is a form of α -function. Dreaming is not a *reflection of* the differentiation of the conscious and unconscious mind, but the psychological activity/function *which generates* that differentiation (and consequently is responsible for the maintenance of sanity itself). If one is unable to transform raw sensory data (β -elements) into unconscious elements of experience (α -elements), one is unable to dream, unable to differentiate being awake and dreaming; consequently, one is unable to go to sleep and unable to wake up. As Bion puts it, 'hence the peculiar condition seen clinically when the psychotic patient behaves as if he were in precisely this state'' (Ogden 2004: 289).

For Bion, the unconscious is *itself* a psychological achievement. Psychotic minds are not able to have experience that leads to thought because they are not able to make raw sensory inputs into digestible material. Instead, they have only β -elements, indigestible fragments that constantly impinge upon a mind that cannot do anything with them, a mind that Bion describes as being like an automaton beholden to the logic of the inanimate. For Bion, psychotics have 'thoughts' but they cannot think, they have ideations, objects, mental 'materials,' but not an integrated inner life.

Bion thus reconceptualizes the movement of analytic work. For Freud, the basic movement is unconscious --> conscious. The goal is to recognize defenses and, in the process, experience something like the horizon of personal transformation. You learn something about yourself that allows for the possibility of growth. For Bion, the basic movement is from unthinkable --> unconscious/thinkable. You go from a situation where there is no barrier between unconscious and conscious, where conscious life is suffused with chaos and projection, to a situation where the self is built up to the point where an unconscious/conscious distinction becomes possible in the first place. The goal is not to *relieve* people of the unconscious, but to *give them an unconscious*, so that they are able to dream, to think, to digest reality and learn from experience. These capacities are developed through a relationship with the mother that Bion calls 'reverie,' the ability for parents to aid in building up the infant's α -function:

"An infant endowed with marked capacity for toleration of frustration might survive the ordeal of a mother incapable of reverie and therefore incapable of supplying its mental needs. At the other extreme an infant markedly incapable of tolerating frustration cannot survive without breakdown even the experience of projective identification with a mother capable of reverie; nothing less than unceasing breast feeding would serve and that is not possible through lack of appetite if for no other reason. We have thus approached a mental life unmapped by the theories elaborated for the understanding of neurosis." (Bion 1984: 37)

These developments of psychoanalytic theory have surprising echoes in Adorno's theory of the new type of human being and his articulation of 'pseudo-culture,' both of which illuminate cultural phenomena that arose in the gap between Freud and Bion. How, in the language of Bion, do new forms of culture diminish α -function or otherwise make it defective? How does contemporary culture become a system of 'greedy' consumption of β -elements for a mind paralyzed by an inability to conceive of any other activity? (Ibid: 11)

Bion's theory of psychotic mental life brings together almost all of dosing culture's major characteristics: infantilization, destruction of memory and attention, liquidation of meaningful relations between parts, the attenuation of the experience of time or history, enforced forgetfulness, rigidity and paranoia. All these embody what Bion calls 'attacks on linking' that make a meaningful, mature capacity for reflection and change impossible. Its tendency is to produce a kind of endless purgatory, a claustrum of meaningless flux, a constant bipolar alteration from slick, manic stupidity to boredom and emptiness.

People who have become addicted to dosing culture will admit that they can 'no longer focus,' can 'no longer read' or even watch films. They cannot maintain attention for an extended period of time. Could it be that this is precisely its attraction, the need that it satisfies? Is there a drive to *stop thinking* that is particularly intense in contemporary society? We've already discussed how its main role is to replace sublimation with dissociation. What 'need' is thus met by dissociation? How should we understand the social-psychology of dosing culture's tendency to prohibit reflection and development?

Contemporary Culture as the Production of 'Synthetic' Psychosis

Bion's theory of psychosis resonates with typical forms of mental life within capitalist culture. At the same time, his thought was developed for therapeutic work with individuals suffering from deep psychological pathologies. There is a question of how to constructively distinguish the psychotic personality from the psychotic-like mental functioning of otherwise 'healthy' people who consume dosing culture—between those of us who experience psychic death only intermittently and through socially produced elements and those who experience little else. How is dosing a form of 'virtual' psychotic life, a sort of synthetic dissociative mental landscape? Does this distinction even make psychoanalytic sense? How does dosing culture function in the overarching ideology of the contemporary culture industry? How does it aid in reification, integration, and commodification of mental life?

There are hints to these questions within Bion's psychoanalytic theory that are confirmed by the critique of the culture industry undertaken by the Frankfurt School. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno speaks about the 'sickness of the healthy.' The Frankfurt School, taking their cues from Emile Durkheim's writings on the sociology of religion, set out to study how capitalist society shaped subjectivity, how it moulded prevalent attitudes, assumptions and emotional economies as well as the basic categories we use to interpret the world. Traditionally, this process was understood to take place through paths of socialization (family life, sexual mores, education, work). For Adorno, mass *culture* was increasingly central to this process, displacing the role of family and religion.

In the process, the dialectic of 'normal' and 'pathological' is socialized. It is not fixed but changes historically. This slippage is a major theme of *Minima Moralia* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and many other classics of this tradition, and is reflected in developments in psychoanalytic theory itself, which departs from Freud's more rigid distinction between psychotic and non-psychotic personalities.

For Bion, early, pre-oedipal forms of psychological organization and behavior never go away. The mental life of 'healthy' people is shaped by, and constantly threatens to slip back into, infantile forms and organizations. Thus the distinction between the pre-oedipal

'paranoid schizoid' position (a pre-self organization incapable of higher mental functions along the lines of 'sublimation,' and tending toward dealing with objects by projection, splitting and other defenses) and the 'depressive' position of more mature mental functioning (an organization that is capable of reality contact and non-defensive object relations) is never fixed. We constantly slip back and forth from one to the other.

What contemporary mass culture manages to do is constantly provoke this slippage. It is not the mind of the individual but the cultural objects themselves that demand this regression into a schizoid style. Dosing culture becomes a sphere rampant with, and in many cases dependent upon, psychological defenses and regressions that prevent a mature contact with reality: projective identification (splitting off of bad parts of the self and projecting them into an object, so that we experience these bad things as being part of the objects and not ourselves), splitting, reaction formations, idealization, repression, etc.

Thus for psychoanalysis—and again, this is a fact exploited by the culture industry—the mind is not fixed but, in the best case scenarios, constantly *managing* regressive tendencies. In psychotic minds this is difficult if not impossible. The question becomes how contemporary culture manages to make what Bion calls α -function defective.

For both Bion and Adorno, thinking is an inherently aesthetic activity, and experience is inherently suffused with thought. They both outline a theory of experience that allows for a non-reductive relation to the object that is also spontaneous and mimetic. An entire school of psychoanalytic aesthetics followed Bion's theory, and considered art a realm of sensuous and imaginative play through which the self, in both artistic experience and creative initiative, moves through a process of creation, destruction and repair. A connection is forged between artistic experience and a self that can tolerate tension and explore reality in a non-regimented way. Aesthetic experience might even be said to be a condition of thought, something through which we move from the primitive mind within us all and its desire to 'possess, control and merge with the object,' to a more mature relationship with reality, "entailing an acceptance of the object's otherness and the self's dependence on it for mental sustenance" (Williams 2014: xiii).

For Bion, the mature capacity for thought, creativity, and growth requires tolerating the intermingling of reflection and sensual experience without losing itself. The capacity for 'reverie' is made possible by a mother who is able to take in the infant's projections and β -elements and make of them something digestible. The mother builds up the infant's α -function. Disturbances in this relationship create disturbances in α -function. Thus, the relation to the mother and the environment more broadly makes thinking possible. The destruction of this environment by standardization and a flood of inanimate, lifeless images inhibits thinking.

For the Frankfurt School, culture comes to replace this 'environment,' and thus shapes the way thinking occurs in relation to objectivity. Bion's work provides an especially illuminating description of how this might take place, i.e. how the environment of social forces comes to dominate in the mental life established in infantile experience—and thus how 'psychosis,' which in analytic theory is internal to a mind that experienced disturbances in early experience—might be generated 'synthetically' by the cultural system as a whole and to take hold of otherwise 'healthy' individuals.

One part of Bion's theoretical program was to revise certain elements of Freud's theory of psychosis, to blur the categorical distinction between psychotic and non-psychotic thought. Bion did so by highlighting precisely the 'phantasied' nature of the break with reality that defines psychosis. In other words, for Bion the slippage between normal and pathological is not as strict as it was for Freud. Freud used this categorical distinction to argue that psychotics were not receptive to psychoanalytic treatment. Bion's refuses this distinction:

"I would make two modifications in Freud's description [of psychosis] to bring it into closer relation with the facts. I do not think [...] that the ego is ever wholly withdrawn from reality. I would say that its contact with reality is masked by the dominance, in the patient's mind and behaviour, of an omnipotent phantasy that is intended to destroy either reality or the awareness of it, and thus to achieve a state that is neither life nor death. Since contact with reality is never entirely lost, the phenomena which we are accustomed to associate with the neuroses are never absent and serve to complicate the analysis, when sufficient progress has been made, by their presence amidst psychotic material. On this fact, that the ego retains

contact with reality, depends the existence of a non-psychotic personality parallel with, but obscured by, the psychotic personality. My second modification is that the withdrawal from reality is an illusion, not a fact, and arises from the deployment of projective identification against the mental apparatus listed by Freud." (Bion 2014: 95)

Thus even for otherwise healthy individuals, the line between normal and pathological, fantasy and reality, virtual and real, are capable of flux. They are open to influence by external forces that act upon the individual even as the individual believes they are 'participating' in them. In the language of traditional Freudian theory, which neither Bion nor Adorno meant to abandon but to develop, we would say that all the functions of the ego under the influence of reality—consciousness of sense impressions, attention, memory, judgement, thought—are put under attack by *the individual's own mind* in psychotic pathology, and *by the environment and the objects themselves* in mass culture.

From Psychoanalysis to Critical Theory: Mass Culture As a System of Defective α -function

It is thus from *within psychoanalysis* that we find a space for the influence of culture upon the subject, and not that cultural critique impinges upon what ought to be restricted to the examination of individual psychology. Psychoanalysis gives way to the critical theory of culture, and to social psychology generally.

We can begin to chart the development of the subject that confronts us today by looking at a number of theories that highlight the power of culture to shape subjectivity. If we are to provide some historical orientation for understanding the kind of psyche engendered by dosing culture, we should expect that there will be echoes between the description of the 'new type of human being' described by Adorno and the theory of psychotic mental life outlined by Bion, and that is precisely what we find.

A New Type of Human Being and Pseudo-Cultivation

Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the culture industry, by replacing traditional culture or

by stepping in where it never existed, was powerful enough to structure the psyche and create a new kind of subject. Mass culture functioned on the order of a new religion, with the capacity not only to generate an entire world of objects but actually to give birth to new structures of mental life. They summarized these new forms under the heading of the 'new type of human being.' The 'new type' was meant to contrast with the bourgeois subject of early psychoanalysis, a subject still capable of sublimation and mastery but suffering from a life of repression and a punitive superego. (Fong 2016) With the new type it suddenly became unclear if there is any subjectivity at all: "In large sectors of society there is no longer an 'ego' in the traditional sense. As all the traditional culture with which educators wish to bring people into contact presupposes the ego, however, and appeals to the ego, the very possibility of cultural education is now highly problematic from the outset." (Adorno 2009: 462-63) Adorno believed the new type was confronted with a reality that was both suffocating and bereft of objects through which the ego might develop. Mass cultural objects inhibit 'reverie.' The result is a dwindled capacity for imagination, an instrumental mindset, a tendency toward distraction and superficial experience, a self that lacks a strong sense of reality yet whose fantasy world is thin and lifeless.

A curious blend emerged that combined qualities first outlined in the theory of the authoritarian personality with new ones that would seem to contradict it, as if certain authoritarian elements were generalized to such an extent that they no longer describe a particular personality type but mental life in general within late capitalism. The new type is not so much a personality within the population as an intellectual style suffusing all of cultural life.

People seemed to combine a rigid reverence for authority with an uninhibited yet hollow self. Conventionalism and submissiveness is paired with a lack of repression, a mind that is not burdened by superego demands and thus much more open to guiltlessly indulging in pleasure. But this pleasure seeking is combined with an overarching instrumental-mindedness, an intolerance of ambiguity and a reluctance to change. Rule breakers need to be punished, and they are aggressive toward those who violate norms. Delusions of fierce independence are shared by all. The world must be split up between strictly good and strictly bad objects, producing a strong sense of suggestibility and a vulnerability to various

forms of irrationalism.

Adorno described this new subject as *Vor-Sich-Hinleben*, "living straight ahead" (Adorno 2004: 468). The new type is instrumental and task-oriented, with a good deal of libido put into efficiency for its own sake without reflecting much upon the meaning of what they are doing. The moral orientation which Freud believed was a key factor of the superego is reduced to the mere demand to 'get things done.' As Ben Fong has put it, "[i]n alternating between work and private life, the new anthropological type switches regularly between this cold goal-drivenness and a lapse into self-forgetting, between states where the ego is fully in charge and where there appears to be no ego at all." (Fong 2020) In other words, it is what Bion described above as "defective α -function [...] an inability to dream through lack of α -elements and therefore an inability to sleep or wake, to be either conscious or unconscious." (Bion 1984: 21)

The new type's tendency to 'live straight ahead' oscillates with an equally strong tendency to bask in reflectionless torpor, a movement that mirrors the fact that in late capitalism free time is really just the obverse of work. They cannot be bothered with the labors required for more difficult pleasures. Individuals must constantly transition from work-imperatives to leisure imperatives, the former being so demanding that the pleasures allowed in the latter require a strict taboo on effort. We mindlessly scroll, swipe, stream, and watch, neither alive to the objects nor asleep to the world.

This new type is compelled to enjoy, to constantly consume more shallow entertainments, but the taboo on effort combined with stunted imaginative powers restricts mature experience. So-called 'high culture' never reached most people, and at the same time the 'traditional' or 'religious' conception of the world was "displaced by the spirit of the culture industry. The *a priori* of the essentially bourgeois concept of culture—autonomy—had no time to develop. The authority of the Bible is replaced by the authority of the stadium, television, and "true stories" which claim to be literal, actual, on this side of the productive imagination." (Adorno 1993: 20)

Adorno developed an objective cultural mode that corresponds to this new psychology,

which he called *Halbbildung*, or 'pseudo-cultivation'—what happens to cultivation in the absence of any broad capacity for sublimation. It answers the question: what must cultural learning and experience become for the new type of human being?

Adorno describes two major tendencies. The first is the destruction of sublimation, and the second is its replacement with behavior that fuels conventionalism. These are not to be understood as separate but as part of a single process. Pseudo-culture, because it no longer passes through sublimation, is much more easily adapted to the needs of competitive society and the external demands of new technologies. It steps into the barren landscape where sublimation has been destroyed and establishes itself along the principles of exchange and cultural signaling described by David Riesman as a kind of 'psychological radar': "What can be internalized, then, is not a code of behavior but the elaborate equipment needed to attend to such messages and occasionally to participate in their circulation. As against guilt-and-shame controls, though of course these survive, one prime psychological lever of the other-directed person is a diffuse *anxiety*." (Riesman 2001: 25) The psychotic mind does not have an 'unconscious/conscious' distinction, it does not 'internalize' so much as it constantly takes things in and spit them out. For a self too impoverished for 'internalization,' the idea of culture 'taking hold' of the unconscious is impossible.

This is why Adorno will speak of 'naiveté,' a form of ideological control that depends not on dominating our unconscious but constantly forcing us onto a plane that is neither unconscious nor conscious. It is not often commented upon, but Adorno, despite his arguments for the centrality of the culture industry in socialization, constantly highlighted the paradoxical superficiality of mass culture's hold upon us, a point which he highlighted in his essay "The Culture Industry Reconsidered" (Adorno 1975) and other works around the same time, such as his reflections on astrology:

"In the whole field of mass communications, the 'hidden meaning' is not truly unconscious at all, but represents a layer which is neither quite admitted nor quite repressed – the sphere of innuendo, the winking of an eye and 'you know what I mean' [...] It may be reiterated that the climate of semi-erudition is the fertile breeding-ground for astrology because here primary naivete, the unreflecting acceptance of the existent has been lost whereas at the

same time neither the power of thinking nor positive knowledge has been developed sufficiently." (Adorno 1994: 54, 61)

It is not necessary to 'believe' in the culture in which one participates, according to some protestant notion of 'belief'. You take things in but you do not 'internalize' in any deep way. Rather, you dissociate or otherwise superficially engage with objects in an endless cycle. Our weakness here on earth does not stop the totally secularized middle classes from projecting their destiny onto the stars.

Limited knowledge becomes indistinguishable from truth. Rational conversation is replaced with various regressive or irrational attacks on perceived enemies'—shaming, projecting, canceling, guilt by association, ad hominem attacks and pathological interpersonal behavior. There is a lack of patience for ideas and suggestions that do not fit into readymade formulas, the 'correct' way of speaking, into tweets, gotchas, packageable content. 'Fans' of cultural product lines become enraged if the latest iteration does not conform into the minutest detail with what they have come to expect.

As Bion puts it, "[i]f the learner is intolerant of the essential frustration of learning he indulges phantasies of omniscience and a belief in a state where things are known. Knowing something consists in 'having' some 'piece of' knowledge and not in what I have called K" (Bion 1984: 24). We look for a 'key' to unlock everything else about the world. We become conspiratorial minded. We don't have arguments but 'takes'. K, for Bion, doesn't mean knowing some bit of information, but the capacity for spontaneous experience, for engaging with reality in a non-reductive way without feeling the need to reduce the new to the standards we already have, which is obviously hobbled by the addiction-like dosing and the pathological norms of interpersonal behavior on social media. Niche subculturalism or intense fandom is combined with a hatred of anything snobbish or any presumption that some things are 'more advanced' or 'better' than others.

Dosing culture is simply the objective, profit-oriented, technological exoskeleton of this process of destruction of inner psychological resources. It is culture that can *only* be engaged with in a superficial way, that requires no real expertise but at most a subcultural

insiderishness: "[w]e may here refer only to the aforementioned detachment of large groups of believers from the 'working' of superstition, and to their interest in net results rather than in supposedly supernatural powers. They don't even see the sorcerers at work any more nor are they allowed to listen to their abracadabra. They simply 'get the dope'" (Ibid: 50). Today an efficiency model of cultural consumption is paired with ambient aggression, and people who step out of line must be punished. Being part of the in-group is essentially tantamount to being willing to attack anyone in the out-group, internalizing in an authoritarian way the mental schemas of a given digital milieu.

Schema and Alienation: Objects Thinking For Us

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim traced what Kant called the concepts of the understanding not to internal or innate 'conditions' of experience per se, but to forms of social, cultural and religious life. The Frankfurt School, as well as psychoanalysis, followed in this tradition, arguing that the schema of the understanding was not a magical process taking place deep within the recesses of the mind, but was enforced upon the subject by early infantile experience, parental figures, social forces and prevalent mores.

But as capitalism is a system that combines recurring crises and catastrophes with transcendent inevitably, culture steps in to replace religion in providing a 'schema' for a world in which the solid is constantly melting into air. As Adorno puts it, pseudo-culture

"furnish[es] whoever is deprived of the continuity of judgment and experience with schemata for coping with reality. These latter certainly do not approximate reality but compensate for the anxiety about what cannot be grasped. Consumers of psychotic readymades feel sheltered by all those similarity isolated, who are bound together in their solitude by a common delusion under conditions of radical social alienation. As soon as it transcends immediate interests, the narcissistic gratification of leading a secret life and belonging to a select group exempts one from reality testing [...] The delusional systems of pseudo-culture are permanent shortcircuits." (Adorno 1993: 34-5)

Dosing culture embodies this alienated 'schema' of inanimate objects thinking for us in a

brutally direct way. Computers, smart phones, AI, algorithms and virtual reality have for years begun to fundamentally alter how we relate to objectivity and even our inner life. The algorithms take over and direct our attention to where it needs to be. This has an effect on the dialectic of 'free time'. A major change between dosing culture and earlier mass culture is that dosing has begun to eat even into labor time. The products can be consumed at work, helping us manage incredibly dull, repetitive tasks. The rise of remote work will continue to diminish the distinction between work and life. Dosing culture bleeds into the interstices that remain.

Dosing culture is the form culture must take for people who are too constantly harried by society to sit quietly with an object. It fills in the gaps between work or between jobs, providing a sense of continuity and endless material that can be easily dealt with in a state of distraction. Donald Winnicott theorizes autonomy as the 'capacity to be alone,' a capacity to be together with an object without disappearing into it, or on the other hand, allowing it to fracture us. This capacity comes from the environment, first the infant-mother relation and later society and culture at large. Capitalist life markedly and consistently destroys not only the relationship of mothers to their children, leaving them with no time for reverie with the child, but also the various stand-ins for this experience later in life'—principally art. Great art is disillusionment by means of illusion. This is classically the purpose of art. It provides a sense of catharsis that results in reflection. Art is a non-presence that is a presence. Art under capitalism becomes the opposite. Dosing culture is a presence that is a non-presence, and this non-presence eventually becomes intrusive. It provides nothing of the deeper experience of art and autonomy even as it never leaves us alone. Being alone with our thoughts begins to make us feel sick, like something is wrong.

There is thus a connection between the psychotic character of dosing culture and the various pathic and paranoid tendencies that infect interpersonal and communicative life. Thought can soften frustration only when the reality principle is dominant. Only then can thought sublimate rage. When Bion says psychosis is constituted by 'attacks on linking,' he doesn't just mean 'attacks on links between thoughts' or ideas. He also means that there are attacks on the relation between inner and outer, between the individual and the world, between one mind and another. Psychotics tend to infect other minds with their own processes, projecting

into other people what they cannot tolerate in themselves. His descriptions of the "fragmented" lifeworld that envelops the subject resonates with contemporary digital culture:

"The consequences for the patient are that he now moves, not in a world of dreams, but in a world of objects which are ordinarily the furniture of dreams. His sense impressions appear to have suffered mutilation of a kind which would be appropriate had they been attacked as the breast is felt to be attacked in the sadistic phantasies of the infant. The patient feels imprisoned in the state of mind he has achieved, and unable to escape from it because he feels he lacks the apparatus of awareness of reality which is both the key to escape and is intensified by the menacing presence of the expelled fragments within whose planetary movements he is contained. These objects, primitive yet complex, partake of qualities which in the non-psychotic personality are peculiar to matter, anal objects, senses, ideas and superego." (Bion 2014: 89)

Section B: Pathologies of Will and Desire

Up to this point we have broadly been examining a socio-historically produced and general incapacity for reflection. For Bion and the Frankfurt School, this means an incapacity for memory, creativity, spontaneity, tolerance of ambiguity, and synthetic reflection. All these functions are necessary for thought that is comported to reality, the capacity to handle tension, but also thought that goes beyond reality and sublimates experiences of frustration, that can imagine and engage in the process of producing social change in a non-regressive way.

Dosing culture not only creates defective thought but also structures our libidinal economy and emotional lives, determining *what* and *how* we desire. The critique of dosing culture thus becomes a question not only of the capacity for thought but of the capacity for non-pathic desire and interpersonal relationships, for behavior that can build something new without regressing to infantile defenses, group psychopathology and fantasies of projective paranoia. This gets to the heart of dosing culture's ideological function, serving as a force of integration that manages the inevitable discontent within capitalist society, and also

structuring the dialectic of 'true and false needs' that is inherent to a capitalist system that reproduces human life accidentally, if it does at all.

Substitute Satisfaction and Distorted Group Life

One of the tasks of analytic social psychology is to understand why people do what they do even when they are aware that their behavior is destructive, irrational and unfulfilling. What unconscious or illicit satisfaction do we gain from dosing culture, and what does this express about the kind of people we are today? What is the relationship between substitute satisfaction and psychotic mental functioning in psychoanalytic theory? How are these two factors related causally? Dosing culture is becoming more widespread all the time. The applications that fuel it are perpetually at the top of download lists and usage data. It is clearly meeting some sort of need, even if it is a need that is socially manufactured. What is its function in the social psychology of contemporary subjects? What kind of psychology could possibly tolerate such a psychotic, claustrophobic, fragmented cultural system, much less demand it?

Needs in every society are not only natural or innate but shaped by social forces. While capitalism doubtless could not survive if it did not to some extent meet society's needs, capitalism as a social form does this accidentally and often for select groups only as a means to its end goal: the accumulation of profit. The result is that many needs go unmet even as there is a proliferation of synthetic needs that have been manufactured from above. Just as capitalism produces huge tracts of empty buildings amidst homelessness, warehouses of food that must be thrown out while people go hungry, so does capitalist culture refuse to satisfy our aesthetic and emotional needs'—for fulfillment, cultivation, personal growth, authentic relationships, spontaneity'—even as it constantly manufactures objects that claim to meet them.

The more people are made powerless over the course of their lives and society at large, the greater is the need for substitutes. Capitalist culture is this realm of manufactured needs that feeds off the alienation built into daily life and society's failure to provide us with meaning. The culture industry exploits this failure to extend its reach. If people were truly satisfied,

they would not want dosing culture. The cycle of non-satisfaction, of promise-disappointment, goes on to further feed a desire for more in an endless cycle. People who are made powerless, lonely and unfulfilled in real life are forced into a virtual world of distractions built to trap them. A market is made for every kind of castrated desire. Mass culture thus functions, within the dialectic of true and synthetic needs, by taking the realm of images, appearances, language, group behavior and ritual, previously met through sublimation, and hijacks them for its own purposes, denuding and manipulating them in the process.

The relation of contemporary digital culture as substitute satisfaction to psychosis is on one level obvious. We are constantly living in virtual realities that for many people progressively replace the real world and relationships. They are simulations for things that are missing or absent: companionship, identity, sex, personal achievement, political agency. Distorted versions are promised in the cultural sphere, siphoning off the libidinal investment previously supplied to other spheres: politics, philosophy, science, art, and group life in general. The more the virtual world supplants the real one, disrupting our drives toward sublimation, the more culture disturbs our ability to generate concepts that have the strength to survive contact with reality. Our minds atrophy, our libidinal attachments to other people wilt.

The kinds of thinking and desire that are native to the virtual worlds are defined by *not* being oriented to real objects, real people, real relationships. The psychotic world is one that is fundamentally without change, it is timeless, a rotating circle. People don't develop. They stick to the same basic tendencies, viciously attached to their beliefs without which they will have an experience of falling apart. The displacement of the drives into pseudo-satisfactions, and the destruction of thinking that results, gives way to pathological relational dynamics. Disordered thought gives way to pathological projections and pathological relations to others. Psychosis is not just a thinking disorder, a disorder that destroys the capacity to grasp reality, but also a social disorder, an inability to create relationships that are mutually beneficial and based in an understanding of who people really are as opposed to what we are projecting into them. These tendencies not only make it incredibly difficult to establish healthy, fulfilling relationships based in empathy and understanding, but also the kind of

group bonds based in solidarity that would be needed to change society in a fundamental way.

Frictionless Objects and Futureless Culture

Objectively speaking, capitalism creates a society that is hollow, punitive and impoverished, but one on which we nevertheless rely. Art has always been a realm of images in which human beings exercise their mind away from the demands of reality, work, and quotidian responsibility, a place for projection, for defamiliarization, for fantasy. We retreat to this realm to train our capacities for non-regressive discontent. Art is where experience and thought intermingle without dominating one or the other, without becoming ruthlessly instrumental. This turn from reality is constitutive of art on a basic level, and through this turn art is often able to hint in direct and indirect ways at the potential for a different world.

If culture as sublimation could be described as a realm of non-regressive dreams, dosing culture is what results when our realm of images can no longer manage to dream up any other world. Bion's description of psychotic life as dominated by the 'inanimate' is reflected here not simply because objects are manufactured in a 'mechanical' way, but because our inner life is structured as a constant mimesis of death. Our inner lives are forced constantly to conform to lifeless objects, or objects that merely 'imitate' living things in the way they speak and behave. Many aspects of dosing culture can be explained by recognizing that the logic of art-imagination'—art as the realm of semblance'—has been replaced by mere recording. Art is less the creation of a self-contained aesthetic world as the mere reproduction of the distorted one. If Samuel Johnson thought Shakespeare was great because his drama, to a greater extent than any other, was a 'mirror or life,' then dosing culture doesn't reflect life, but life not lived. It is a mirror of life that, because it is hollow, has to ever more emphatically play itself up. The memoryless subject is stuck in constant repetition compulsion of moments that are not worth remembering: we have countless photos, a backlog of life, huge matrices of data that chart our every move. A manic quality infuses the content that festoons our digital lives. The middlebrow 'slice of life' is no longer a self-contained genre but a dominant principle: culture becomes a moment of reality picked up by a recording mechanism, published on a platform, and threaded through an

algorithm'—totally mediated spontaneity. The result is not a sense of authentic life but rather a sort of schizoid fragment of life. It is what happens to art as it becomes an economy of images without hope.

If art gives us all the good parts of religion without the bad'—a sense of transcendent experience, groundedness in the world, a connection to others and to history, an opportunity for the experience of dignity, meaning, and an integral self all while refusing to provide explicit directives, requiring the individual to think for themselves and come to their own conclusions'—dosing culture gives us all the bad parts of religion without any of the good'—dogmatism, moralizing, irrational authority, infantilism, authoritarian submission, conventionalism, and paranoid projection where individuality is taboo. Adorno's descriptions of contemporary psychology constantly emphasized our atrophied capacity for imagination. Sublimation was becoming thinner, flimsier and more rigid. This is echoed in Bion's description of the paranoid mind, set upon by projections that are both 'thin' and 'tenaciously' held. For Bion, the distinction is between a mind that *modifies* reality versus a mind that constantly *evades* it through manipulation, projection, splitting, and attacks on inner and outer objects. The mind under this regime,

"intends not to affirm but to deny reality, not to represent an emotional experience but to misrepresent it, to make it appear to be a fulfilment rather than a striving for fulfilment [...] it is possible to increase understanding of the insane by considering his failure to substitute a misrepresentation of the facts for the representation that corresponds to, and therefore illuminates, reality." (Bion 1984: 49)

The culture of dissociation does not alleviate discontent but momentarily cuts us off from awareness of it. This points to a possible relation between dosing culture and the constant stream of unspoken-for catastrophes that accumulate in our visual field. Contemporary culture is able to combine boredom with catastrophic violence and social anomie. A world in tatters presses upon us as something lifeless that is impinging on a mind that can never digest what it is seeing and experiencing. Online subcultures spill out into the real world to enact violent fantasies and acts of heroism.

"Beta-elements are not amenable to use in dream thoughts but are suited for use in projective identification. They are influential in producing acting out. They are objects that can be evacuated or used for a kind of thinking that depends on manipulation of what are felt to be things in themselves as if to substitute such manipulation for words or ideas [...] Such an act is intended 'to rid the psyche of accretions of stimuli'. Beta-elements are stored but differ from alpha-elements in that they are not so much memories as undigested facts, whereas the alpha-elements have been digested by alpha-function and thus made available for thought" (Ibid: 6-7).

Subjects behave more and more like automatons while the objects and technologies that surround us become increasingly adept at imitating conscious life. Our world of images involves no frustration, no testing of reality. Its formal qualities are made precisely to meet this demand, to allow it to wash over us in a constant stream. It must feel like an escape, but it is an escape that never leads anywhere. Creators and the platforms themselves establish a cult of frictionless intuitiveness. Images start to look more 'virtual'—lifeless and synthetic and free of imperfection.

If an artwork manages to pose a question, it must be thoroughly resolved by the thing itself, or else no question is posed by it in the first place. Open ends are taboo, unless they are setting you up for the next bit in the series. The tension that normally develops in aesthetic experience as a result of following through a relation of parts never materializes because there are no parts or relations. Instead you have instantaneous engagement and perhaps only then a moment of 'passing judgment.' You swipe left or right, 'like' something or ignore it, pile on vitriol or republish it onto your 'timeline'. A curious feature of dosing culture is this combination of reflectionless passivity and dissociation with an explosion of pseudo activity that replaces the aesthetic experience the previously took place within the individual. Cultural reception is replaced with external manipulations, a sort of barbarism of tactility: the clicking of a button or an icon. We don't 'think through' the objects but stupidly act upon them. The more aesthetic experience is moulded to be a process of frictionless, passive internalization, the more the companies must make the consumption seem like something in which you are actively participating, engagement modeled on trying to poke a dead object back to life.

The lack of development within the objects bleeds into the general feeling that life is suffused with images and ideas that accumulate but never advance. Vapid nostalgia steps in for cultural tradition, long ago made synonymous with reaction, and memory becomes an automated, algorithmic process taking place outside the individual. The overall effect is a cultural sphere that has become an automated, subjectless process, a constantly rotating stasis. Cultural experience is a path we all chart through a purgatory, the endless repetition of the same with no development, a timeline with no telos.

"A life modeled in every respect according to the principle of equivalence is exhausted in reproducing itself, in the repetition of movement. Its demands on the individual are made with such strength and severity that he can neither hold his own against them as someone in control of his life nor experience them as part of his human purpose. Consequently, bleak existence'—the soul which does not aspire to anything higher in life'—requires substitute images for the divine, which it obtains through pseudo-culture." (Adorno 1993: 27)

The scroll, the dose, the post, the selfie: they are all symptoms of culture being strangled by repetition compulsions of psychotic life with no time, no end, no meaning, no real dream of the future. It is not only in the format or the content that this takes place. It's the way that culture today becomes a flow, a backdrop to daily life. It smooths everything over, making us less aware of the contradictions and daily humiliations of life within capitalism beholden to the death drive.

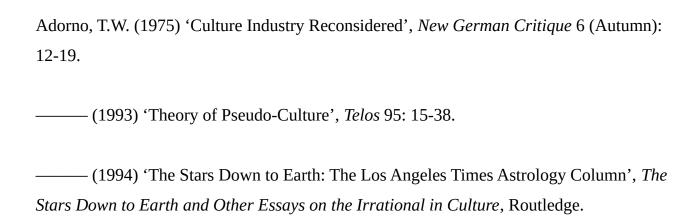
A Subject that Can Neither Wake Nor Dream

We have become mere appendages to our own culture, the realm that was previously understood to express the essence of people, their desires and collective, unconscious wishes. The experience of 'letting go,' of 'losing oneself,' of 'dropping out' that began to replace active aesthetic engagement has not been lost in the transition to digital dosing. It has merely been domesticated. What is disrupted in the process is not the aesthetic itself, but the relationship of the aesthetic to social transformation, a relation that was always indirect and would reveal itself only in reflection on the artwork itself. Once you cut off reflection

from aesthetic experience, the relationship between art and social change becomes impossible. The directive is to participate, but to never allow this participation to lead one to any broader conclusions about life or society. The products of the culture industry, in their form, content, and modes of distribution, are shaped by this taboo – the taboo on linking aesthetic experience to the dream of a better world. Art today leads us away from reflective, conscious experience not to a realm of dreams, but to a purgatory where there is neither waking nor dreaming. They prevent us from finding in memory and in history, both objectively and within the individual, any resources for the radical potential Benjamin believed to be the essence both of historical inquiry and aesthetic experience. Art becomes an eternal pouring into a leaking vessel.

The hope for us lies in the fundamental non-identity of our true selves with the subjects to which culture appeals to, expressed by culture's ultimate failure to truly deliver satisfaction and it's increasingly explosive inadequacy for the task of managing social discontent. Art's relationship to social change is often considered in a much too direct and unmediated way. The best art can do is to help us to generate a capacity to think. Despite the great efforts of its purveyors, culture can only cover over the cracks in society so well. The more people are forced to log off, to engage directly with reality and with one another face to face, the more contemporary culture's flimsiness will be exposed. Art, though, will not save us. For that, we need politics.

References



——— (2004) 'Notizen zur neuen Anthropologie', Adorno, T. W. and Horkheimer, M.,
Briefwechsel, Bd. II: 1938-1944, Suhrkamp.
——— (2009) 'The Problem of a New Type of Human Being', <i>Current of Music: Elements of A Radio Theory</i> , trans. R. Hullot-Kentor, Polity Press.
Bion, W. R. (1984) <i>Learning from Experience</i> , Routledge (Maresfield Library).
——— (2014) 'Differentiation of Psychotic from the Non-Psychotic Personalities [1957]', <i>The Complete Works of W.R. Bion, Vol. VI</i> , Karnac Books.
Bloom, H. (2001) How to Read and Why, Touchstone.
Fong, B. (2016) <i>Death and Mastery: Psychoanalytic Drive Theory and the Subject of Late Capitalism</i> , Columbia University Press.
———— (2019) 'What Does America Believe?', <i>Damage Magazine</i> , 3 June, https://damagemag.com/2019/06/03/what-does-america-believe/ .
———— (2020) 'The Disaster of Half-Education', <i>Damage Magazine</i> , 3 April, https://damagemag.com/2020/04/29/the-disaster-of-half-education/ .
Hullot-Kentor, R. (2008) 'A New Type of Human Being and Who We Really Are', <i>The Brooklyn Rail</i> (Nov), https://brooklynrail.org/2008/11/art/a-new-type-of-human-being-and-decomposition

who-we-really-are.

Kernberg, O. (2008) 'The Destruction of Time in Pathological Narcissism', *The* International Journal of Psychoanalysis 89(2): 299-312.

Nabokov, V. (1962) 'Nabokov's Interview. (02) BBC Television', http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/Inter02.txt.

Ogden, T.H. (2004) 'An Introduction to the Reading of Bion', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* Vol. 85(2): 285-300.

Riesman, D. (2001) *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, Yale University Press.

Tolentino, J. (2019) 'The Meme Factory', The New Yorker, 30 Sept: 34-41.

Williams, M.H. (2014) 'Introduction', *Art & Analysis: An Adrian Stokes Reader*, Karnac Books.

How to Scratch Off Wallpaper

by Veronika Russell

1.

To establish themselves and gain even momentary recognition, artists have to be pragmatic and strategic with their engagements and associations. An artist's career is full of trivia that determines an aspiring talent's acceptance into the art world. Early on in their vocation, artists need to internalise themselves as brands, consider the niche of their wares and capitalise on the fabric of their subject-matter, which is allocated to them through crude accounts of their cultural, gender or class identity. Three predominant currencies of artistic practice today are the female, the queer and the racial. The gallerists and curators, however, are very careful when bestowing their trust. They write the life chronicles of contemporary art. They admit openly that their responsibility is to select those few worthy of the public's attention and to allow them entry into the annals of history; this, whilst simultaneously swearing to the subject of a people's history—making a history of victors out of a people's history.

2.

The gross sum of the artist and their work is reinforced by the artist's constant online presence; manifestly whimsical creatures, goofballs and ragamuffins, empowered to be just the way they are, carefully curating their Instagram accounts to appear simultaneously free and hardworking. It is well understood: the artists that are (over)productive and evolve organically (very slowly) from one series to another are the safest to deal. Moreover, the image of an artist with, for example, a somewhat impish personality, an occasional substance abuse, an unpredictable pattern of personal relationships, are no longer viewed as alluring characteristics of a creative orientation. As such, when choosing a female artist that works on the motif of the woman (motherhood, body-image, sexual abuse), an art dealer has to consider her age and her reproductive ambitions, her sense of fashion and her willingness to submit, in order to certify her work ethic and her overall image that will be attached to her output. Artists of colour employed by the gallerists are the accessories to greater

political relevance and the signifiers of a more socially conscious market. A black artist has to wholeheartedly submit their services to a gallery that until now only represented white artists and yet remain grateful for being brought to market. Within contemporary fine arts and painting, queerness is by far the most prolific subject matter and outwardly its own aesthetic without artists necessarily identifying as queer or gay themselves. In fact, the volatile indeterminacy of this ontology, its fluidity, if you like, admits the imposters. The camp, the kitsch, the gimmicky and everything in between finds its way onto the canvas to suggest the vulnerability of its producer, even when their façade breathes of Buffalo City Court.

3.

For the enthusiastic beholder of *l'art contemporain*, the activity of gallery-going is phenomenologically situated somewhere between training for a marathon, supporting local businesses and attending the opera. It is both good for public health and for one's individual soul. At an art show, a potential buyer is immediately detected by the agents of the gallery or by the artist herself. The symbolism of wealth in this setting is the sign of good will and noble intentions.

4.

Every gallery hall of every calibre and standing has its own celebrated body of artists, writers and collectors. The surplus pedestrian viewer (friends and family members of the artists, other artists, local residents, students of curatorial studies, other students, etc.) is both financially irrelevant and economically necessary. Under the same roof, with a glass of wine, all parties find pleasure in meeting either the young and beautiful or the old and statured. Looking at art objects becomes an occasion to share a cab. These events, nonetheless, seal the signatures for the sales, which usually happen prior to the show's opening in a solemn but dispassionate atmosphere of back and forth negotiation and transaction.

If the recognition for a contemporary painting is reduced to a mere noticing, then the ability to hold some meagre attention is the decisive strength to obtain some success. Even at private viewings, the collector is rarely left with an artwork in solitude or in silence. Nor does he want to be. The rattling sound of doubt in the painting's quality and worth invokes the need of constant assuagement.

6.

As a matter of course, after an enjoyable evening at a gallery comes annoyance and cynicism. Expressed almost in unison, the audience of last night, today at lunch, resents the painting for failing them in offering anything new. However diverse, every painter's mode of expression appears, their narrow knowledge of art history and the restricted confidentiality of their own craft inspires in the viewer a resounding *seen it*. The viewer expects to be shaken out of their stupor, while remaining unmoved within, disappointed by the art's unmoving nature. One's inner flatness is proving unresponsive to the flatness of a painting. Abstract painting, once so providently ascribed to the abstractness of a historical moment, now becomes a necessity for an unskilled artist while appealing to a fed up viewer. There is little that could scandalise, nor dazzle a contemporary audience. The institutionalized guilt and investment consultancy has replaced the sense of capitulation in front of an artwork. The distrust is, however, mutual. Contemporary painting knows the poster-like personality of its beholder and readily adjusts its principles. Contemporary painting can engage in a variety of topics, but never again will it give a birth to a blue period.

7.

Painting and its audience have reached an unspoken agreement, a kind of guilt-driven naturalisation, only to be admired and to admire on the terms of a placid exchange of pleasantries. A ready-to-reject-viewer is solicited by a painting in meek tones, reminded only of what is already known to him and finally wooed, on occasion, into a monetary transaction. This particular relationship is most prominent when it comes to young

paintings. The most cautious today are the young.

8.

The caprice of an artist choosing her subject and medium is transgressed by the viewer's habit to consume. It is required from a painter to stay within a particular line and not to overburden their works with too much seriousness, or with excessive skilfulness. In its forms of expression, contemporary painting in particular, has to remain light, if not funny. If newer mediums of art like video, installation, performance etc., can directly engage with things that are *not pretty*, painting has developed a vocabulary to minimize liability. In fact, the mediums difficult to hang on a wall hold monopoly on the *serious*.

9.

The artifice of our social existence has brought us so close to the *absurd* that what we demand of art is no longer to derail our sense of reality or to disparage our social naïveté. Rather, in pursuit of many *safe spaces*, we are hoping not to be snubbed; we desire once and for all to be understood and admired for *who we are*. The whisper we want to hear is that anyone can make a work of art. What truly makes it special though is what we desire to see in it. Our (the viewer's) complexity determines the *je ne sais quoi* of the artist's intentions. The customer is always right. This is why any positive theoretical justification an artist may give next to their work is met with enmity and why a well executed painting is met with suspicion. The only things we are ready to treat with remote interest are our own ramblings and their equals.

10.

Painting hasn't merely changed over time. More than any other art, painting negated its own modes of expression, interpreted and reinterpreted its history, restated its goals and over and over proclaimed its own impotence and potency respectively. Its own fascination with itself is notably what makes it modern. Modern painting demanded to be taken very seriously; gradually it abandoned servitude for lordship, it strove to cope with concrete reality, it

stripped off the effects and masking techniques of painterly schools and its proclaimed masters. It longed to establish the true language in uncorrupted depiction of human nature and the nature of society. Since Eduard Manet, still representational, painting has given its attention over towards its flat surface, plainly in reference to other paintings and canonical scenes without chasing any aesthetic improvement, on the whole voicing something that has not been orated before—the growing incapacity to look at a work of art.

11.

No longer skilful to impress the viewer, nor to elevate an individual and the masses, painting had to claim the realm of the intellectual. Avant-garde movements that followed one another did not busy themselves in offering a promise of even momentary elevation, but readily reinstated in the viewer a feeling of humdrum and corrosion creeping from his everyday life. Because painting was now cut open like a body on a surgical table with the viewer an assistant of dissection, the effect on the viewer was rather sobering. As such, an aesthetic experience was no longer needed, progressively replaced by an apparition of *experience*. Some sixty years ago experience was something the viewer stumbled upon by accident. To be vulnerable in the face of an artwork and its chiselled psychology signified an intrinsic revelation about one's historical reality. To sense belonging or non-belonging to a certain aesthetic orientation would equally revere their place in time. To see an experimental group show in the basement of an abandoned building in the Lower East Side in the freezing cold in the late 1960s and then to see an early painting by Delaunay at the Guggenheim gave an impression of a complete cycle of life and death.

12.

The appeal to the intellectual doesn't by itself mean disillusionment. Rationality in art reflects the condition of society. However, it does so without knowing. Art doesn't know itself; artists do not constantly remind themselves that their profession belongs to the critique of society—at least not without great fantasy—and the artwork is never without illusion. A painter enjoys painting and this is the very matter that makes art practice critical. Viewers and consumers of art, on the other hand, have pitched their tent at the direct

opposite of art's utopian character. The act of participating in the actualisation of an artwork's meaning transformed the viewer, in his own eyes, to the level of the artist.

13.

No longer subordinated to the church, art today is demoralized by the economy and its constant eye over the artist's shoulder. Today, a work of art has not been initiated into the status of art before it has been interpreted through its viewership. The patrons of contemporary art are its trumpeted magistrates. They are the ones holding lanterns in the night and knocking on the doors of a sleeping neighbourhood. To know today you are looking at a work of art, you have to know those whose gaze is directed at it as well.

14.

The one commonly learned practice for painters is to prepare a canvas, still cultivated in art institutions. One builds her own stretcher, the other buys it readymade; one stretches a row canvas or cotton duck, the other stretches a pre-primed; one primes it with rabbit glue or gelatine, the other with acrylic gesso, a third keeps it un-primed and stretched directly on the wall. There are variations on how to fold your canvas at the corners when stretched on the bars, a debate on what nails to use, defenders of the primed and un-primed edges. In short, the surface of an embryonic painting is treated with care and consideration, something an art school professor can question you about ad nauseum. In a way, the canvas surface at the preliminary stage of production is taught to be highly important and is valued as one of the crucial aspects of a painterly practice. The dogmatism of this preparatory process is a way of bringing each individual painter unto a level of a unified standard. Respect is gained through an irreproachable technique of presenting, framing and hanging the work. Yet, there are practically no rules in treating a painting so studiously prepared at first. What happens next is where the artist is said to assume her freedom and learns how to swim on her own. There are conventions through which a serious artist proceeds in her completion of a painting, such as: not painting on the edges, vertical composition, if on a large scale to stay within two meters, if small within 40 cm, all remaining within a regular rectangle.

Anyone who has inclinations to doodle, sketch or actually draw will be familiar with the feeling of frustration at the inadequacy of the hand in following a preconceived idea. Often the result is at best a cartoonish version of the ideal we imagine in our heads. This is not different for the professionals we call artists (painters). The difference however is in their learned fascination with their own idiosyncrasies, and acceptance of their own incapacities. It develops to a degree when anything they imagine is already altered to fit these peculiarities. An artistic practice becomes a signature. Not in a sense of Botticelli's outline, or Bellini's pink, Philippino Lippi's folds, Tintoretto's *contre jour*, or even Bacon's staged compositions, but rather an industrial quote that replaces an automated stamp on a brand's merchandise, i.e. not a conception that finds its realisation in every detail, but an easily reproducible detail, familiar and endlessly repeated. What is required for success is that an artist *stays true to himself* while staying true to the manufacture's patent.

16.

Contemporary painting has no aesthetic movement. It has no particular parties. Through its ways of aesthetic expression it claims to oppose nothing but art history. However, opposition to the past is manifested not through negation of antiquated forms or motifs, but in the appropriation of pictorial references, direct stylistic quotations and well known elements. A group show can at once exhibit a geometrically abstract, a minimalist, an expressionistic, a hyper-realistic, a neo-cubist, a primitivist and a spray painting. All nonetheless united under an ersatz polemic niche-curatorial subject. This diversity of fashions, rather than styles, in contemporary painting is a result of contemporary art education, where isolated references are the only means by which students learn to connect to their professors. The categorial fractions are divided not due to what the artist makes, but through whom the artist knows.

17.

Amongst the seemingly numberless subjects depicted in contemporary painting, few are

more exploited than others: palm tree, antique statues, vagina, female body (feet excluded), corners of a room (after Bacon), fragment of a table (table top), peacock. The objects are either placed on a monotone abstract background, floating in 'air', or secluded in a provisional outline interior. There are usually two or three parallel narratives and two or three plans: foreground, background, external element. Even the apparently expressionistic paintings contain all three latter ingredients. The background usually directly follows the priming of the canvas and is done neatly, in subtle tones and harmonious colours, often akin to a watercolour painting, some stains and spray painting included. This perhaps soothing process is then climaxed by less congenial, but broad brush strokes that intend to break free from the confinement of the canvas structure and form a foreground. The external element, painted yet in a different technique, has but no obvious connection to the rest and is instrumental in reminding the viewer of the painting's limitations, its flatness, or of the artist's diverse talents and his indecipherable psychology.

18.

To direct one's gaze through the mechanics of composition, to leave some parts inconceivable, or to rely on the viewer's patience to discover them with time is no longer an intention of a painter. Realistic (representational, figurative) paintings that attempt to create many-figure compositions ((neo-)genre-painting), are the ones either painted directly from a photograph (screen or printed), or with the help of a projector. These photographs are first manipulated on the computer: cropped, collaged, their colours adjusted, etc. When finally transferred onto a canvas these painted photographs relay a specific perspective that is never natural to the human eye and strips open any dark and subtle corners of their innuendo.

19.

The repetition of an element through the surface of a painting, continuously stretching from every corner, a kind of pattern that could be virtually prolonged and has no compositional centre, beginning nor the end, is another way to connect together background and foreground. This repeated element could be a high-culture reference, an abstract figure or a kitsch ornament. It presents a perfect playground for a painter to pin on top of it any other

decoration and fulfil a dream of the guilty pleasure to vandalise wallpaper.

20.

Leave the solemn subjects and colours behind. Let the old be opinionated and afflicted. We are not better off, of course, but who cares? At least we know how to dance to the sound of a jackhammer. Let our paintings be of fresher substance. They need not survive us.

Art and Social Reality: Historical Origins of Aesthetic Abstraction

Ross Wolfe

[I]f in the case of great realism the real element appears noticeably large and the abstract noticeably small,

and if in the case of great abstraction this relationship appears to be reversed, then in their ultimate basis (goal) these two poles equal one another.

Between these two antipodes, then, can be put an equals sign:

Realism = Abstraction

Abstraction = Realism

— Wassily Kandinsky, 'On the Question of Form'

Neoplasticism has its roots in cubism,

but it could just as easily be called the painting of real abstraction [peinture abstraite réelle]

since the abstract can be expressed by plastic reality, achieving what all painting has strived for, albeit in a more veiled manner.

— Piet Mondrian, 'Neoplasticism: the General Principle of Plastic Equivalence'

The fundamental concern of the abstract painter does not seem to be with the details of "social reality."

Consequently, abstract art is often seen by revolutionaries as escapist.

Yet the artist may simply be focusing on the problem of constituting a better world yet to be born,

where shortcomings of society are treated as transitory facts [...]

Hence the interpretation of space-time can be a truly radical act.

— László Moholy-Nagy, 'In Defense of "Abstract" Art'

Early in the development of modern art, realism was often counterpoised to abstraction. Painterly or pictorial realism—to be distinguished from the post-1848 *école réaliste* led by Courbet, whether of a naturalistic or socialistic bent—was known for its lifelike representation of objects, which it accomplished with a variety of techniques. Artists used perspective, chiaroscuro and anatomical knowledge to create an *effet de réel* across the canvas surface. Verisimilitude sought to be *true to life*, remaining faithful to what was thus represented, whereas cubist and abstract art either distorted objects or did away with them altogether. Such was the rationale of MoMA founder Alfred H. Barr in his 1936 survey of *Cubism and Abstract Art*: 'It is customary to apologize for the word "abstract" [...] The verb 'to abstract' means to draw out of or away from, but the noun 'abstraction' refers to something already drawn out of or away from [...] Like a geometric figure or an amorphous silhouette, it has no apparent relation to concrete reality.' (Barr Jr. 1936: 11)

Undoubtedly, this was a rather crude simplification, as writers like Meyer Schapiro were quick to point out. (Schapiro 1978: 195) Barr was nevertheless right to note the reservations some held about the nomenclature. 'Just as "abstract art" is a misleading term for the tendencies that depart from the old spatial approach, so is "cubism" an inappropriate name for the beginnings of the contemporary image,' complained the historian Siegfried Giedion, as 'it is not the "abstract," much less the "cubical," which is important.' (Giedion 2008: 437) What was more important, he insisted, was the altered spatiality and temporality of the real world.[1] Pablo Picasso meanwhile told the critic Christian Zervos in 1935 'there is no abstract art,' rejecting also the 'figurative' versus 'nonfigurative' binary. 'You must always start with something,' he stated baldly. 'Only afterward can you remove all traces of reality.' (Picasso 1972: 9)

Artists themselves would often vacillate on this score. Naum Gabo and his brother Antoine Pevsner, both arch-abstractionists, proclaimed in their jointly written *Realistic Manifesto* (1920) that 'the realization of our perceptions of the world, in the forms of space and time, is the singular aim of our pictorial and plastic art.' (Gabo and Pevsner 1976: 212) Piet Mondrian began to regard his own work as a new realism near the end of his life.[2] Wassily

Kandinsky, formerly the champion of *abstrakte Kunst*, had by 1938 taken up Theo van Doesburg's slogan of *art concret*. (Kandinsky 1994e: 832) More examples could easily be adduced.

Part of the confusion is semantic. Another part is contextual, since the choice to identify with realism or abstraction at any given moment depends on both stylistic convention and polemical intent: 'Every artistic epoch has its own realism, invented either as a continuation of or reaction against that of the preceding epochs.' (Léger 1973b: 114) Yet the remainder—perhaps even the lion's share—is *material*, and has to do with the shifting character of social reality. If twentieth-century avant-gardes were driven forward by a 'passion for the Real,' (Badiou 2007: 134) then it follows that reality itself had grown increasingly abstract. Space and time assumed ever more abstract forms under capitalism, which art both unconsciously reflected and consciously strove to transform. Giedion famously interpreted the modern movement as registering a new conception of 'space-time,' with cubism and futurism conducting investigations into space and time, respectively. (Giedion 2008: 430-48)
Whereas he viewed these as paralleling the discoveries of natural science, the historical origins of aesthetic abstraction in fact lie elsewhere: namely in commodity society, mediated by the real abstraction of labor.

John Berger once remarked that 'true reality is concealed by a screen of clichés.' For idealists and materialists alike, it exists somewhere past the realm of superficial appearances. 'Modern artists have always thought of their innovations as offering a way to make reality more evident,' he wrote. 'Here, and only here, they found themselves at times fighting side-by-side with revolutionaries seeking to pull down this same screen.' (Berger 2015: 267) Like their socialist counterparts, the modernists hoped to harness the vast productive energies unleashed by capitalist modernity in order to overcome it. Both modernism and socialism, according to T.J. Clark, cast a 'shadow,' and were thus 'caught interminably [...] between horror and elation at the forces driving them.' (Clark 1999: 8) The spatiotemporal dialectic of capital allowed artists to envision a rationally reordered world, even as it (de)sensitized everyone still caught in its nexus. Daniel Spaulding is right to observe that 'the value-form offers a broken image of utopia,' and to see the fate of the avant-garde as bound up with the defeat of social revolution.[3] Scarcely anything sums up

the historic rout of abstract art better than its decorative role in company boardrooms throughout the postwar West, while *sotsrealizm*, a kitsch monumental style, triumphed in nominally socialist countries behind the Iron Curtain.

What follows will be split into five sections: first, an inquiry into the aesthetics of real abstraction in terms of time and space; second, an analysis of works by painters like Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian through this lens; third, a look at interwar art movements in Europe; fourth, an account of abstract art's further adventures in the United States; and finally, a retrospective balance-sheet of the classical avant-garde in light of these considerations.

The aesthetics of real abstraction

By most accounts, the earliest recorded instance of 'real abstraction' appears in a well-known study by German sociologist Georg Simmel. In the opening chapter of *Philosophy of Money* (1900), he wrote: 'Not only the study of the economy but the economy itself is constituted by a real abstraction [*einer realen Abstraktion*] from the comprehensive reality of valuations.' (Simmel 2004: 76) Given the title of the book it should come as no surprise that Simmel would locate this abstraction in exchange, where money acts as a lubricant. This has clear implications for the forms of social consciousness that correspond to this economic basis, something he partially draws out.[4] It is significant that Simmel saw the abstraction here as objective, and not a matter of subjective whims. 'While the desires of individual subjects are important,' he explained, 'these could never by themselves bring about the value-form, which is the result of balancing objects against each other.' (Ibid: 77) Qualitatively distinct items are rendered commensurate by a pecuniary logic that in Simmel's view governed modern mental life.

For Marxists, the concept of real abstraction was introduced as an explicit theme by Alfred Sohn-Rethel. Real abstraction differs from ideal abstraction, he recognized, in that 'it is not thought-induced.' Commodity exchange requires abstract equivalence to obtain at the level of social practice, since 'it does not originate in men's minds but in their actions,' and must therefore be seen as 'a *real abstraction* resulting from spatiotemporal activity.' (Sohn-Rethel

1978: 20) One of the few aware of Sohn-Rethel's thesis prior to the seventies was Theodor W. Adorno, who adopted an analogous framework. Adorno thus argued in 1968 that the category of 'totality,' despite its seeming abstractness, was the *ens realissimum* of society. 'Insofar as it seems abstract, this is not the fault of unrealistic thinking but of the exchange-relation, the objective abstraction that social life obeys.' (Adorno 2003a: 120) Lecturing earlier in the semester, he expanded:

'The abstraction in question [totality] is really just the exchange process itself, the underlying social fact through which socialization first comes about. If you want to exchange two objects and—as is implied by the concept of exchange—if you want to exchange them in terms of equivalents, and if neither party is to receive more than the other, each must leave aside a certain aspect of the commodities. Exchange takes place in developed societies using money as the equivalent form [...]. Bourgeois political economy demonstrated, as did Marx in his turn, that the true measure standing behind money as the equivalent form is the average necessary amount of social labor time, which is of course modified depending on the relationships that dictate the exchange. Necessarily disregarded here are the specific forms of the objects to be exchanged; instead, they are reduced to universal units of average necessary labor time. Hence the abstract character of the relation consists not in the abstracting mode of thought adopted by sociologists, but in society.' (Adorno 2000: 31-2)

Philosophically, the conversion of abstract social existence into corresponding conceptual forms was achieved above all by Kant. Defining epistemology as the attempt to elaborate 'a coherent, all-embracing ideology suited to the productive relations of bourgeois society,' Sohn-Rethel asserted that 'this endeavor culminated in Kant's critical philosophy.' (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 14)[5] Adorno and Sohn-Rethel devoted more energy to epistemic issues as such, however, seeing the Kantian 'unity of apperception' as modeled upon a sort of idealized business transaction. 'What is so magnificent about Kant,' Adorno commented, 'is that he still possesses the uninhibited frankness of a man not ashamed of his bourgeois attitudes, who is thereby able to express something of their truth. In his philosophical system, we find that the act of cognition is a kind of exchange wherein equivalents are swapped so that the debts are settled evenly and all the sums work out.' (Adorno 2001: 26-

Contrary to the claims of this system, though, the so-called 'pure concepts' of the understanding do not stand outside of history. Sohn-Rethel was emphatic in this regard: 'Kant was right in his belief that the basic constituents of our cognition are preformed, but he was wrong in attributing this preformation to the mind itself engaged in the phantasmagorical performance of an *a priori* synthesis locatable neither in time nor in space.' Rather than derive the table of categories in an idealist fashion, materialist criticism must look for their source in the dominant mode of production, being 'historical by origin and social by nature.' (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 7) Once this sociohistoric derivation has been fleshed out, it can serve as a much-needed corrective to Kant's 'hypostasis of spontaneous mental states.' (Ibid: 37) For Sohn-Rethel, Kant's twelve primary forms of cognition can be extrapolated from the real abstraction of exchange. Yet he includes 'abstract time and space' under this broader rubric as well:

'An abstraction happens to time and space in acts of exchange, as opposed to use. Use links time and space inseparably to natural rhythms and historical ways of living: the ripening of crops, the sequence of the seasons, the hunting of animals, man's birth and death and everything that transpires during his lifespan. Exchange enforces abstraction from this, since its objects are presumed to be immutable for the duration of the transaction, which takes time (covering the delivery of commodities and payment upon the deal's conclusion). But this time is emptied of the material realities which inform its content in acts of use. Likewise with space, say the distance goods have to travel in changing owners. Time and space become abstract under exchange, marked by homogeneity, continuity, and emptiness of natural and material content.' (Ibid: 48-9)

Strictly speaking, space and time are forms of intuition in the Kantian system, rather than forms of cognition, as with the categories. In other words, they pertain to the transcendental aesthetic and not the logic. What is meant by 'the aesthetics of real abstraction' is precisely this: the abstract space and abstract time that prevail under capitalism. Considering the centrality of exchange in the statements of Adorno and Sohn-Rethel, however, there is still the chance that the foregoing might be misread as a circulationist account. Fortunately,

certain Marxists have already grounded abstract space and abstract time in the sphere of production. Henri Lefebvre wrote about the former, while the late Moishe Postone wrote about the latter. In a word, real abstraction arises principally from the peculiar character of labor in capitalist society.

Lefebvre examined the phenomenon of abstract space in *The Production of Space*, where he described the primitive accumulation of capital as a period in which 'labor fell prey to abstraction, whence abstract labor and abstract space.' (Lefebvre 1991: 49) Though it spreads historically, it is radically antihistorical. 'Abstract space is coextensive with abstract labor—Marx's term for labor in general, or the average expenditure necessary to produce an item—and hence the commodity structure,' stated Lefebvre. Underscoring its reality, he added that 'abstract labor is in no way a mental abstraction; rather, it has a social existence, just as exchange value and the value-form themselves have.' (Ibid: 307) Despite its tendency to eliminate or smooth out existing differences, 'abstract space is not itself homogeneous, but has homogeneity as a goal.' (Ibid: 287) Qua Euclidean geometry, or elsewhere Cartesian *res extensa*, Lefebvre held that 'abstract space is measurable, and subject to quantitative manipulations: statistics, programming, projections.' (Ibid: 352) Geographic/historical space, which is overlaid onto its geologic/natural predecessor, is thereby contrasted with geometric/ahistorical space. 'Yet abstract space is the outcome not of an ideology or of false consciousness,' Lefebvre carefully contended, 'but of a practice.' (Ibid: 393)

Postone examined the phenomenon of abstract time in *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, where he wrote that 'the conception of abstract time—uniform, continuous, homogeneous, empty, independent of events—became increasingly dominant in Western Europe between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.' (Postone 1993: 202) Much like Lefebvre's abstract space, abstract time for Postone coincides with abstract labor: 'Because of the mediating character of abstract labor under capitalism, the value-form of wealth and its measure (abstract time) are also constituted as "objective" social mediations.' (Ibid: 189) Such mediations began to make themselves felt in the late Middle Ages, during 'the transition in time reckoning to commensurable, interchangeable, and invariable hours.' While technical inventions such as the mechanical clock aided this transition, they could never have changed longstanding practices on their own. 'Rather, this technical invention

itself, as well as the conception of abstract time, must be seen in terms of the "practical" constitution of such time, that is, with reference to an emergent form of relations that gave rise to constant time units as socially "real" and meaningful,' suggested Postone (Ibid: 212); namely, with reference to capitalism. He therefore concluded that 'abstract Newtonian time' was the 'temporal frame of value.' (Ibid: 292)

Time and space in capitalist society conform to the real abstraction of labor. 'Labor always takes place in space and in time,' writes Patrick Murray. 'Due to the power of capital, space and time come to exist and be experienced as abstract.' (Murray 2016: 163) Once wage labor generally takes hold, their contours are transformed. Giedion, as mentioned in the introduction, saw new painterly techniques (abstraction, movement, simultaneity) as evincing the notion of 'space-time' utilized in modern physics. It is possible that art and science independently mirrored the changes of time and space which occurred under the capitalist mode of production. Both branches of human activity, art and science, began to represent time and space more abstractly as these dimensions were themselves reshaped by social processes.

In his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno sketched a few lines about abstraction in modern art. 'From the very outset, aesthetic abstraction, which in Baudelaire was a still rudimentary and allegorical reaction to a world that had become abstract, was foremost a prohibition on graven images,' he wrote. 'Since Rimbaud, all the way down to recent avant-garde art, the obstinacy of this prohibition has been constant, changing no more than the fundamental structure of society.' (Adorno 2002: 21-2) Painting gradually retreated from straightforward representations or 'graven images' of external reality, until abandoning figuration altogether. His onetime mentor, Siegfried Kracauer, made this point in 1960: 'Abstract painting is not so much an antirealistic movement as a realistic revelation of the prevailing abstractness; the configurations of lines in which it indulges faithfully reflect contemporary mental processes.' (Kracauer 1960: 294) Kracauer's line here neatly encapsulates the entire premise of this essay, but leaves it at that, never isolating the specific mechanism of abstraction. Jean-Luc Daval hinted toward this mechanism in his *History of Abstract Painting* when he credited the rapid pace of industrialization with 'the cultivation of a new spatiotemporal awareness' (Daval 1988: 19-20), which in turn left its mark upon

the artistic products of the era.

Modern art as 'a reaction to a world that had become abstract,' or else 'a realistic revelation of the prevailing abstractness'—such are the aesthetics of real abstraction, captured in the medium of paint. The present essay cashes in on these suggestive remarks by grounding them in the abstract forms of intuition opened up by capitalism, the time and space unique to its operation. How do these forms relate to painting, and to aesthetic judgment more broadly? Basing oneself on Kant, as before, the matter hinges on the connection between the first and third *Critique*, on the way the imaginative faculty informs determinations of taste and creations of genius. Leonard Goldstein did something similar with Renaissance art and linear perspective (Goldstein 1988), and Sohn-Rethel himself attempted to apply his analysis to works by Tintoretto and Dürer[6], but no one has yet done so with respect to abstract art.

Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian

Returning to a discussion of art proper after such a lengthy interlude is by no means an easy matter, however much choice quotes from Adorno and Kracauer help ease the transition. Nevertheless, the relation of art to society is a venerable theme in Marxian theories of culture. Even before the advent of Marxism, idealist treatments of philosophy, religion and art sought to relate these objects to their historical milieu. Just as Hegel defined philosophy as 'its own time comprehended in thought,' so might art (especially plastic art) be understood as its own time apprehended in sense. Usually, the procedure followed by Marxists is to track these ideological expressions of the *Zeitgeist*—whether philosophical, religious or artistic—back to their material substrate. One way to situate art in its time is by 'recognizing that it is not historically autonomous, but rather an element of the complex totality in which we live.' (Mattick Jr. 2003: 8) While art should not be deemed wholly epiphenomenal, materialists must always seek to ascertain its social bases.[7]

Historians of art have often marveled at the independent co-discovery of abstract painting across multiple countries before the war. Michel Seuphor, one of the first to offer a comprehensive guide to the genre, invokes as much in 1949. Seuphor recollected:

'From the beginning, abstract art has been characterized by its internationalism, by what might be called its "statelessness," as befits a language which aspires to be universal. Prior to 1915, there were three main centers: Paris with Picabia, Kupka, Mondrian, and Delaunay; Munich with Klee and Kandinsky; and Moscow with Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich, and Tatlin. Later, during the first world war, the new centers were Leiden with De Stijl, Zürich with Dadaism, and Florence with Magnelli, Severini, and Terroruti. Then Paris again came to the fore, as Weimar grew into a hive of creativity with the foundation of the Bauhaus.' (Seuphor 1964: 148)

Schapiro was impressed by 'the genuine internationalism of culture achieved by modern art' as well, claiming: 'Art today is independent of tongue. Individuals who speak French, Spanish, German, Russian, English, and Japanese work in the same Paris studios, exhibit together, and influence one another; their paintings, in turn, tour internationally.' (Schapiro 1999b: 145)

Different artists arrived at similar conclusions from a wide range of paths, converging around the year 1913. Kandinsky took the way cleared by postimpressionism and Matisse, while Malevich went from Cézanne to suprematism via cubofuturism. Not far behind them was Mondrian, following the cubists Picasso and Léger toward total abstraction. What lay behind this sudden simultaneous drift? By no means should the artists' self-understandings be taken as the final word here, though these do provide some clues, as most artists were averse to materialist explanations of their work. For Kandinsky, the scientific disenchantment of the world must itself be artistically counteracted. 'Our souls are only now beginning to awaken after the long reign of materialism,' he wrote in his treatise, Über das Geistige in der Kunst (1911). 'Yet the nightmare, which turned the life of the universe into a purposeless game, is not over.' (Kandinsky 1994a: 128) Geistige can be translated as either 'mental' or 'spiritual' and shows up in Sohn-Rethel as *geistige Arbeit* reflecting real abstraction. Commenting on Kandinsky's usage, Adorno maintained that this simply spiritualized the material process going on around him and reified it as self-sufficient.[8] In other words, the Geist of abstract art was founded upon the ambient reality of abstract labor in capitalist production.

Many have highlighted the fact that both Kandinsky and Mondrian drew inspiration from mystical doctrines, specifically theosophy. Kandinsky frequently cited the theosophist Blavatsky, while Mondrian was a dues-paying member of the Theosophical Society for nearly two decades. Until the postwar period, it remained an important point of reference for Kandinsky. 'His interest in theosophical matters subsided as he became clearer about the role played by rational elements in art,' explained Will Grohmann, one of Kandinsky's closest friends, 'very much like Mondrian, an adept of theosophy from 1899 to 1917, who came upon the neoplasticist mantra: "matter becomes spirit by being internalized." To Mondrian, the difference between matter and spirit shrank every day.' (Grohmann 1958: 84) Roughly around this time, amidst proletarian revolution, Malevich wrote of 'spiritual materialism' in a letter to intellectual Mikhail Gershenzon. (Malevich 2015: 118)

Either way, it would be a mistake to overrate these artists' theoretical lucidity, as for instance the French phenomenologist Michel Henry did in his monograph on Kandinsky. Grohmann was right in giving the more modest appraisal: 'Kandinsky was a Russian writing in German, and was a painter, not a theoretician. Besides, the established terminology of aesthetics could scarcely serve his purposes; he had to invent concepts, words, a method.' (Grohmann 1958: 97) None of this is to say that Kandinsky was not well-read, of course, as he was clearly familiar with the latest scientific and philosophic literature, not to mention the arcane discourse of theosophy. Whatever their shortcomings, moreover, Kandinsky's writings on art possess a symptomatic significance insofar as they make manifest something which is latent in the world. 'In every case, the "abstract reality" represented in most recent paintings is a reality abstracted from the world,' Henry later reflected, 'which is to say that it is conceived, delineated, dedicated, and elaborated on the basis of the world, ultimately as the world's most adequate mode of expression.' (Henry 2009: 12-13) Although Henry's choice of Kandinsky as the abstract painter *par excellence* is rather tendentious, it is worth noting his argument:

'Despite its revolutionary character, abstract painting leads us back to the source of all paintings, for it alone discloses the possibility of painting and allows us to understand it. The fact that abstract painting comes late in the history of culture and even at its decline, at

the time of its division and self-negation, does not prevent it from leading us, by a huge leap backward, to its [conceptual] origin. Of course this is not its historical origin, which is lost in oblivion, but its ever-present and active foundation: the eternal source of all creation.' (Ibid: 3)

Henry thus felt that painting as an historical phenomenon could only be properly grasped at the end of its developmental arc. Looking at it more closely, one discovers that the argument he made about abstract painting is isomorphic to the argument Marx made about abstract labor in the *Grundrisse*. Compare it with this passage:

'Bourgeois economics' point of departure—namely, the abstraction of "labor as such" or "labor pure and simple"—becomes true only in practice. Even the simplest abstraction it places at the head of its discussions, which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth solely as a category of modern society. The example of labor shows how even the most abstract categories, despite their validity for every epoch (owing to this abstractness) are, in the specific character of their abstraction, a product of historic relations and thus fully valid only within these relations.' (Marx 1993: 105)

In Henry's argument, abstract painting in modern aesthetics sheds light on painting as such and can illuminate even primitive creativity. Similarly in Marx's argument, abstract labor in modern economics sheds light on labor as such and can illuminate even primitive productivity. Abstraction in aesthetics and economics attains reality in modern times, once certain social practices become general enough, but not before. No doubt, Henry failed to identify the material factors behind this historic confluence, unable to break out of his vitalistic ontology. Otherwise, the argument he made is more or less identical to that of Marx, albeit less reflexive. With the onset of capitalist modernity, Adorno wrote that 'the archaic silence of pyramids and ruins becomes conscious of itself in materialist thought as the echo of factory noise in the landscape of the immutable.' (Adorno 2003b: 94) Kandinsky sensed this in the oblique affinity modern artists felt toward 'primitive' art: 'Just as art seeks help from the primitives, individuals turn to bygone days and half-forgotten methods.' (Kandinsky 1994a: 143)

Propitiously, German theorist Wilhelm Worringer delved into this 'primal artistic impulse' in a celebrated 1907 doctoral thesis. He wrote of *Abstraktionsdrang* as a kind of transhistorical psychic law, borne of a longing for tranquility amidst chaotic natural surroundings: 'Man's need to find repose was bound to find its first satisfaction in pure geometric abstraction.' (Worringer 1997: 35) For Worringer, however, this psychological urge to abstraction was not a 'product of calculation' but a 'purely instinctive creation' in the face of primordial dread. (Ibid: 19) This urge to abstraction was experienced by artists at the time as an 'inner necessity,' to use Kandinsky's phrase. But spirit here bore the impress of matter, the internalization of external affairs. Like Worringer, Kandinsky underestimated the extent to which calculating patterns of thought had themselves become instinctual. Reminiscing about his days as an economics student, he wrote that his 'only love, apart from the question of wages [*der Lohnfrage*], was purely abstract calculations [*das rein abstrakte Denken*].' (Kandinsky 1994c: 363)

Worringer's explanation of the urge to abstraction as 'the striving to create resting-points within the flight of appearances, necessity inside the arbitrary, absolution from the anguish of the relative' is however too narrow. Insofar as he specified nature as the original and enduring source of this 'disquiet vis-à-vis the outer world,' (Worringer 1997: 108) Worringer glossed over the gulf that separates prehistoric from historic man, and underestimated the role played by sociological pressures in shaping the psychology of the latter. Disquiet could just as easily be provoked by the tumult of 'second nature,' humanity's historical selffabrication[9], as by first nature. Some European painters even emulated older forms of representation in order to escape the capricious abstractions of the capitalist world.[10] Near the fin-de-siècle, with the balance of power teetering on the brink of catastrophe, social reality felt ready to burst at the seams. Georg Lukács may have held modern art in low esteem, but he proved quite perceptive here: 'One of expressionism's forerunners, Wilhelm Worringer, delivered a funeral oration for the movement in October 1920. As Worringer saw it, the collapse of this movement was more than just the business of art, marking the collapse of an attempt to master the "new reality"—the reality of imperialism, the epoch of world war and revolution.' (Lukács 1981: 76)

Cubism had already gestured in the direction of this reality with its fragmentary and multifaceted distortions.[11] Jean Metzinger and Albert Gleizes traced their lineage to the nineteenth-century realist school, but preferred the *réalisme profond* of Cézanne to the *réalisme superficiel* of Courbet: 'Reality is deeper than academic recipes, and more complex also.' (Metzinger and Gleizes 2008: 419) Meanwhile, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire described cubist technique as 'the art of painting new ensembles with elements borrowed not from the reality of vision but the reality of consciousness. Every man has access to this inner reality.' (Apollinaire 2008: 486) He based his own aesthetic meditations on notes sent to him by Delaunay about 'the construction of reality in pure painting.' (Delaunay 1978a: 94-5) Futurists like Umberto Boccioni shared this view, writing in March 1913 that 'everything in art must be constructed with the abstract values of reality, as structures of a new inner reality which elements of external reality are helping us construct.' (Boccioni 2009: 140) Two years later, Malevich announced a 'new painterly realism' as the subtitle to his essay 'From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism.'[12]

Kandinsky was therefore entirely justified in putting the equals sign *Abstraktion = Realistik* in 1912. 'Between the realism of purely abstract and purely realist composition,' he recorded in the pages of the *Blaue Reiter*, 'lie all the possibilities of combining abstract and real elements within one picture.' (Kandinsky 1994b: 254) Van Doesburg's modernist digest *De Stijl* ran a long piece by Mondrian in October 1917, wherein he stated: 'Our age of material reality can be simultaneously called an age of abstract reality. In all fields, life grows increasingly abstract while remaining real.' (Mondrian 1993a: 43) Yet again, real abstraction is determined here by relations of equivalence. 'We can say that modern man, though cultivated and refined, despite his spiritual improvement,' asserted Mondrian, 'does not really partake of the new mentality if he fails to seek equivalence, the form of life heralded by our material environment.' (Mondrian 1993c: 257) Delaunay was of a similar mind on this matter: 'Abstract art is the representation of its time and a very strong reaction to that which occasioned it. No longer a symbol, it is instead a material reality living and constructed in space [...] Such art is human, having become social.' (Delaunay 1978b: 33)

The evolution of artistic forms thus followed a medium-specific logic while also reflecting the real abstraction of capitalist society. Regardless, it would be erroneous to treat the move toward abstract painting as the result of youthful bravado or avant-garde one-upmanship. Unlike the cubists, most of whom were in their mid-twenties in 1907 (usually seen as a milestone), the pioneering abstractionists tended to be further along in their careers when they took leave of figurative art. 'Mondrian was forty in 1912, Kupka forty-one, Kandinsky forty-six,' noted Seuphor. 'Hence older painters were the ones to stake out the new territory and settle there for good.' (Seuphor 1964: 8) Every step forward was accompanied by a certain hesitancy. Lecturing in 1914, Kandinsky recalled that 'the objects did not want to disappear altogether from my pictures,' so he 'was obliged to wait patiently for the hour that would guide my hand to create abstract forms.' Kandinsky 1994d: 396) Questioned as to whether he arrived at his conclusions suddenly, Mondrian answered: 'Very gradually—first I abstracted the capricious, then the freely curved, and finally the mathematically curved.' (Mondrian 1993b: 75) For Malevich as well, who was in his mid-thirties when he painted *Black Square*, it was a difficult transition. 'In 1913, trying desperately to liberate art from the ballast of objectivity,' he admitted, 'I sought refuge in the square.' (Haftmann 1973: 194) [13]

International constructivism in the interwar years

After the war, and alongside revolutionary uprisings throughout Europe, abstraction formed part of the push to integrate art into life. No longer would Art (with a capital 'A') be cordoned off from the rest of Life, as a separate sphere, but rather merged with it. To many this required the abolition of Art as such, at least in the sense *les beaux-arts* had acquired toward the end of the eighteenth century. Guy Debord saw the culmination of this movement against 'Art' in dadaism and surrealism[14], both of which failed but produced their own abstract paintings along the way. Despite his undeniable brilliance, Debord neglected to grapple with the most serious attempt to supersede the dichotomy between art and life—international constructivism.[15] Larry Shiner notes that '[i]f the provocations of Tzara seem merely naughty and those of Breton overly esoteric, then the anti-art declarations of the Russian constructivists were potentially of greater social importance, given constructivism's roots in Marxist theory and its opportunity to help build a new society.' (Shiner 2001: 256) Russian constructivism should of course be distinguished from the version exported to the West. However, both strains are important to the development of

abstract art.

Yet more deserves to be said about the other '-isms' of art that were prominent during this period. Even those forms of modern painting that held onto figurative representation underwent a change, not just in terms of the cubistic fragmentation of the objects but in terms of the objects represented. Purism, the postcubist style founded by Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret in Paris, concerned itself with a set number of *objets-types* drawn from the inventory of mass-produced goods: guitars, bottles, glasses, etc. Usually these were arranged into still-lifes, flattened out and simplified. So while they did not aesthetically mimic the real abstraction of labor in capitalist society by getting rid of objects altogether, purist paintings nevertheless alluded to it by representing only standardized industrial products. In broader terms, the whole 'machine aesthetic' could be seen as incorporating this logic insofar as machinery mediates the labor process. 'Contemporary man lives more and more in a preponderantly geometric order,' wrote Léger in a 1924 article on 'The Machine Aesthetic: The Manufactured Object, the Artisan, and the Artist.' (Léger 1973a: 52) Other forms of modern art were therefore also bound up, albeit obliquely, with production.

The pivotal event in this historical sequence was the October Revolution of 1917, and the wave of struggles it set off. Abstract art had only just divested itself of representational content when the drums of war began to beat, and soon thereafter a concerted effort on the part of revolutionaries to 'transform the world war into a civil war.' (Lenin 1964: 39) From that point on, aesthetic abstraction became a springboard for the construction of a new society. Geometricism was dominant in the abstract paintings of this period, along with attempts to portray dynamic motion in a static medium. Yet these paintings tended to aim at their own obsolescence, at the end of painting and indeed the end of art as such. Quite a few artists gave up easel painting altogether, moving on to other media and working on diverse projects. Nowhere was this more the case than in Russia, where radical social transformation appeared to be on the agenda. Beyond Russia's borders, constructivism continued to spread as an artistic style but stalled out at the level of formal abstraction, without ever transcending the surface of the canvas. Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian—the three main innovators of abstract art before the war—were deeply distrustful of the

constructivist movement, but none could escape its influence entirely.

Constructivists were generally more materialistic in outlook than these three painters, and had a better feel for art's place within the division of labor. Vladimir Tatlin, rightly considered the father of constructivism, coined the slogan 'art into life!' in 1918 (Tatlin 1988: 339). He had worked as an icon painter for a time, among other things, and was later inspired by Bracque and Picasso to create painterly reliefs. While Tatlin never painted any pure abstractions himself, his sculptural experiments during the war clearly owed a great deal to the quasi-futurist paintings of Mikhail Larionov. Starting in 1918, he was appointed head of the Visual Arts Department within the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment [Narkompros]. In honor of the Bolshevik takeover, Tatlin crafted his famous Monument to the Third International in the form of a spiral, intuitively matching the way Engels and Lenin conceived of the historical dialectic. Other abstract geometric shapes were suspended inside the coils of the spiral: a cube, a pyramid, and a cylinder all rotating at different speeds, as Nikolai Punin explained in a brief 1920 summary (Punin 1974: 15).

Tatlin's anti-art impulse was carried further by the husband-and-wife duo Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova. Rodchenko and Stepanova had both been adepts of nonobjective art before the revolution, but by the early twenties felt that painting had run its course. At the September 1921 exhibition $5 \times 5 = 25$ in Moscow, Rodchenko displayed a triptych with monochrome panels painted in the primary colors. 'I reduced painting to its logical conclusion and exhibited three canvases: red, yellow, and blue. I affirmed: it's all over; this was the end of painting,' he recalled in a 1939 memoir about his collaborations with Mayakovsky. 'Basic colors. Every plane is a plane and there is to be no representation.' (Bois 1990: 238) Just a few months prior, Rodchenko proclaimed in his credo: 'Down with art as a means to escape a life that is not worth living!' (Rodchenko 2005: 142) Meanwhile Stepanova stressed in a lecture she gave at Inkhuk that 'constructivism moves towards the rejection of all art.' (Stepanova 1988: 175) For the rest of the decade, Rodchenko and Stepanova abandoned painting; he focused on photography and graphic design, while she worked on textile patterns and workplace uniforms.

However, the most systematic statement of the movement's aims came in 1922 with a

pamphlet by Aleksei Gan. Simply entitled *Constructivism*, it declared uncompromising war on art from the very first page, instead affirming that 'it was essential to conduct experiments within life itself.' (Gan 2013: 59) Gan was candid about his adherence to historical materialism, which he leveraged to criticize the ideology of aesthetics (understood as the philosophy of fine art). Supposedly eternal values in art—beauty, sublimity, lifelikeness, balance, and proportion—all withered before the flux of productive relations. Unlike Rodchenko or Stepanova, Gan had no formal artistic training, though he showed some talent as a painter. Nevertheless, he was a skilled polemicist and theoretician, skewering 'the high priests of aesthetics' and advancing a constructivist program to replace outmoded forms of expression.[16] While abstract painting per se was not the main focus of *Constructivism*, its layout was clearly influenced by suprematist canvases, with solid blocks of color and empty spaces offsetting and accentuating strips of text.

Boris Arvatov, another signatory of the statement by the First Working Group of Constructivists in 1921, sought to provide a more sociological account of the shift that had taken place in the sphere of artistic production. 'Modem painting has passed from the imitative to the abstract picture,' wrote Arvatov in 1923, 'advancing in two major directions. Expressionism, the first direction, was the path on which forms were treated emotionally, which led to extreme idealistic individualism. The second direction among the so-called abstract painters, constructivism (i.e. Cézanne, Picasso, Tatlin), is quite contrary to the first.' (Arvatov 1974: 43) Like his fellow group members, he was preoccupied with the big question of how to fuse art with life. 'Art and life—how should these apparently heterogeneous phenomena be connected to each other?' Arvatov asked in his seminal 1926 tract *Art and Production* (Arvatov 2017: 15). He offered a brief sketch of art's historical development, especially its transformation in the modern age alongside the capitalist division of labor. Further along, Arvatov described the flight from 'easelism'—by which he meant both painting and sculpture—into constructivism, as part of the productivist turn toward the organization of everyday life.

Nikolai Tarabukin also wrote extensively about the artist as producer. In his idiosyncratic essay *From the Easel to the Machine*, published 1923, he attempted a more formal analysis of this same turn. Rather than follow Arvatov's sociology of art, Tarabukin preferred to

proceed immanently, in terms of the artworks themselves. Judging Rodchenko's $Red\ Plane$ in the $5\times 5=25$ show to be 'the last picture [kartina],' he remarked that it took painting even beyond the limits reached by Malevich with the $Black\ Square$: 'Even if Malevich's canvas came chronologically earlier, Rodchenko's similar canvas was logically more symptomatic [$logicheski\ simptomatichnee$] and historically more timely [$istoricheski\ bolee\ svoevremenno$].' (Tarabukin 1923: 12) Constructivism, with its emphasis on producing utilitarian objects, was to Tarabukin not without contradictions and residues of the craftsman mentality. Still, he defended it as the best current within the budding Soviet avant-garde. Drawing upon the German conservative philosopher Oswald Spengler's diagnosis of the West as in terminal decline, Tarabukin wrote that 'nonobjectivity inheres in the process of all work [...] as the essence of contemporary culture.' (Ibid: 33) Money and the machine had rendered modern life abstract, according to Spengler, such that abstraction constituted the Urph"anomen of 'Faustian civilization.'

Gabo and Pevsner, mentioned at the outset, helped spread the gospel of constructivism far and wide after emigrating to Berlin in 1922. Around the same time, Ilya Ehrenburg and El Lissitzky were dispatched to Western Europe as well, announcing in the pages of Veshch'/Gegenstand/Objet (the very name of which indicated its internationalism) that 'The Blockade of Russia is Coming to an End.' (Ehrenburg and Lissitzky 1974: 55-6) Lodder draws a sharp distinction between constructivists inside and outside the USSR, in light of the former's steadfast opposition to aesthetics compared to the latter's wavering (Lodder 1985: 42). Undoubtedly, there is something to this, insofar as Gan himself argued that 'the chief mistake of comrades Ehrenburg and Lissitzky is that they cannot tear themselves away from art.' (Gan 2013: 70) Without question, the commitment to superseding art among constructivists would fade the further they got from the October Revolution, in time and in space. But the initial reception of constructivism abroad largely affirmed this impulse, as evidenced by the 1920 photo of the dadaists John Heartfield and George Grosz holding up a sign that read 'Die Kunst ist tot! Es lebe die neue Maschinenkunst Tatlins!' Two years later, accused of using the state-funded trip to Germany and the Netherlands to promote Unovis, Lissitzky shot back: 'We are taking not art but communism to the West.' (Lissitzky 2003: 55)

In May 1922, a Congress of International Progressive Artists convened in Düsseldorf under the banner, 'Artists of all nationalities, unite!' Several countries sent their own constructivist sections, which intervened at various points during the proceedings. Van Doesburg read a prepared statement for the Dutch De Stijl group, while Lissitzky did so on behalf of Veshch'/Gegenstand/Objet. Finally, constructivists from Romania, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and Germany added to the chorus. 'Just as the feeling for life prevented us from painting like the impressionists, prevented us from accepting the old,' they declared, 'it now makes us wish to paint, to build, to create the new reality.' (Richter, Bauman, Eggeling and Janco 1974: 67) Henryk Berlewi, a Polish painter and art theorist, noted the multiplicity of national variants: 'Constructivism is divided into multiple groups, each of which has a distinct character, for instance, Russian as well as Hungarian, German, and Dutch constructivism.' (Berlewi 2002: 472) Despite these different flavors, one constant was the ambition to link social and artistic revolution together on an internationalist basis, mirroring that of the Comintern founded in 1918—an International of abstract art aiming to overcome art, or end its alienation, much as the International of abstract labor aimed to overcome labor, or rather end its alienation. This was constructivism's dream.

Karel Teige, a Czech constructivist, therefore wrote in a 1925 article on 'Constructivism and the Liquidation of "Art" that 'constructivists make no proposals for a new art, but rather propose a plan for the new world, a program for the new life.' (Teige 2000: 333) Earlier in the same piece, he explained what 'Art' signified here:

'If we have been using, and will perhaps be using, the word "art" as an auxiliary term, we must warn that we do not refer to sacred and sublime art with a capital A. We do not allude to a beautiful academic art, ars academica, les beaux arts, which modernity dethrones. OUR CIVILIZATION IS NOT THE CIVILIZATION OF ART AND CRAFT (l'epoque des arts et des metiers) BUT THE CIVILIZATION OF THE MACHINE (le siecle de la machine!).' (Ibid: 331-2)

Teige felt the lesson of mechanized civilization was maximum output for minimum input, since after all 'it is the machine that has shortened the working day while retaining optimal efficiency.' (Ibid: 337) Yet at the same time he abhorred base mechanolatry, criticizing those

who rhapsodized about machinery in poetry or represented machines in painting. *Blok*, an avant-garde periodical in Poland, clarified that '[c]onstructivism does not imitate the machine but finds its parallel in the simplicity and logic of the machine.'[17] László Moholy-Nagy argued along similar lines in a column on 'Constructivism and the Proletariat' for the journal *Ma*, but linked mechanization to the awakening of class consciousness (Moholy-Nagy 1975: 95). Constructivists would supply abstract forms adequate to the machine age, a spiritual extension of the revolutionary materialist principles of 1917.

Moholy-Nagy was one of constructivism's foremost representatives outside the USSR, a protégé of Lissitzky hailing from Hungary. He settled in Weimar in 1923 with an appointment to teach at the Bauhaus, where he would instruct a whole generation of abstract painters. Van Doesburg joined him there the next year, whereas Gabo joined the faculty as a visiting professor after the school moved to Dessau four years later. 'In the political, economic, and social ferment that followed defeat in 1918,' Daval says, 'Germany was to become the crucible of the new art, the crossroads of Europe at which innovatory ideas from North, South, East, and West came into productive collision.' (Daval 1982: 78) Journals like Ma, Veshch'/Gegenstand/Objet, Lef, De Stijl, Contimporanul, Zenit, Disk, Blok, Zwrotnica, Praesens, ABC, 7 Arts, L'Esprit Nouveau, and Kino-Fot all flourished during this period. Perhaps the constructivist organ par excellence, though, was G: Moholy-Nagy's colleagues Ludwig Hilberseimer and Mies van der Rohe each contributed to it, as did Hans Arp and Man Ray. Walter Benjamin even translated an essay by Tzara for its third issue. Geometric abstractions reigned supreme in these 'little magazines,' in terms of both their formatting and their typography. Across the European continent, abstract art achieved a hitherto unimaginable degree of generality.

Of course, the most radical upshot of constructivism—that aesthetic abstraction should lead to the apotheosis of art as such—gradually ebbed as the possibility of a broader social revolution grew more remote. But the forms remained, even if the content behind them was obscure. Constructivists throughout Europe continued to produce numerous abstract paintings. Following the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany, many painters of this persuasion fled to Paris. There they started groups such as Cercle et Carré, Abstraction—Création, and the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles. Revolutionaries remained among their

ranks: Wolfgang Paalen, Jean Hélion, Otto Freundlich, Bart van der Leck, Auguste Herbin, Nadia Khodasevich, etc. Even relatively apolitical artists like Joaquín Torres-García described 'A Will to Construct' as the basis of the entire age (Torres-García 2013: 78-80). As the twenties wore on, abstraction became increasingly widespread but also by that same score somewhat etiolated. The regression of this period owed to its lack of proximity to revolution. In any case, many of these same European artists eventually washed up on the shores of North America.

Abstract art's American adventures

Here again Schapiro offered an interesting counterpoint to the thesis advanced above, namely that abstract art mirrored the real abstraction of capitalist society. To a historian of his training, such a claim must have seemed far too speculative and grandiose. Following a criticism of interpretations that derive modernist paintings purely from the machine aesthetic, Schapiro already in 1937 raised a strong empirical objection:

'A similar criticism would apply to the corresponding derivation of abstraction in art from the abstract nature of modern finance, in which bits of paper control capital and human transactions all assume the form of operations on numbers and titles. We may observe that the United States and England, the most highly developed centers of financial capitalism, were among the last countries to produce abstract art.' (Schapiro 1978: 207)

Without knowing it, Schapiro anticipated the arguments of Adorno and Kracauer cited in our first section. Schapiro would go on to befriend both men, whom he met as émigrés in New York the next year. Presumably he continued to disagree with them on this score, however. It cannot be denied that he had a good point. Vorticism originated in England around 1913, and Arthur Dove painted canvases in the United States at roughly the same time, but otherwise 'indigenous' abstract works were few and far between. Katherine Dreier and Man Ray helped found the Société Anonyme in 1920 along with Marcel Duchamp, but most of the pieces they exhibited were European imports. Joseph Stella, an Italian immigrant, served as an ambassador for futurism in the US, while Louis Lozowick, born in Ukraine, played a similar role for constructivism. English painters such as Barbara

Hepworth and Ben Nicholson were members of the Abstraction-Création group in Paris, as was the Australian John Wardell Power. None of these figures, save Dove and Wyndham Lewis, were regarded as particularly groundbreaking; most were considered imitative, albeit individually talented. Yet if the logic of the contention linking aesthetic to economic abstraction is to be believed, should one not expect the US and England to have led the way in abstract art?

The answer to this question is circuitous, but no less plausible for being so. Many have asked, for analogous reasons, why a militant proletarian movement never coalesced in England or the US as it did in continental Europe. Due to a variety of factors, abstract labor did not achieve the same level of class consciousness in the Anglophone world. Revolutionaries thought that the concentration of capital would lead, pari passu, to the concentration of labor power in these countries, and to forms of political organization that aimed to bring about socialism. Germany, Holland, and France were quite advanced in terms of industrial production, of course, but Russia and Italy were both predominantly agricultural. Nevertheless, Russian and Italian cities contained a burgeoning working class that made up for their relative backwardness, and indeed futurist technophilia may well have owed to this fact. Futurism gained more of a following in these countries than anywhere else, after all. Abstract art is, in the account presented here, the unconscious expression of abstract labor, and corresponds to the class consciousness attained wherever it appears. Here in the US, it is striking that its own trademark brand of abstract art would emerge from communist circles, especially from the Trotskyist milieu in New York City from 1937 to 1945.

Trotsky had spent a few months in New York at the outset of 1917, praising it as 'a city of prose and fantasy, of capitalist automatism, its streets the victory of cubism.' (Trotsky 1970: 270) Trotskyism in the US dates back to 1928, when three members of the CP-USA were expelled for reading a note in support of the Left Opposition. Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, and Schapiro—the three art critics perhaps most closely associated with abstract expressionism early on—would gravitate to Trotsky's politics over the course of the next decade. 'One day it will have to be told how "anti-Stalinism," which started out more or less as "Trotskyism",' Greenberg reminisced in 1961, 'turned into art for art's sake, and thereby

cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come.' (Greenberg 1989: 230) Serge Guilbaut has, more than anyone else, catalogued the intellectual climate of this time in response to the Stalinist strictures of prescribed realism (Guilbaut 1980). In his archeology of the period, Guilbaut showed that a number of painters also adhered to this tendency: Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb and Ilya Bolotowsky all belonged to a dissident current within the American Artists' Congress under Schapiro's leadership, as did Barnett Newman in the 1940s (Guilbaut 1983: 39-40, 68-70). Jackson Pollock's wife Lee Krasner, a skilled abstractionist in her own right, was also a fervent admirer of Trotsky.

Even the non-Trotskyists among the abstract artists in New York during the thirties often came from a communist background. Norman Lewis, a Harlem-based painter, turned away from both the 'Negro idiom' and 'social painting' toward abstraction (Lewis 2006: 134), but remained unchanged in terms of his personal outlook. He thus wrote to his friend James Yeargens in 1947 about his move to abstract art: 'After seriously painting and thinking scientifically, I came to certain definite conclusions. You'll find yourself doing this as well if you approach painting as a true Marxist.' (Lewis 1989) During these decades, from the midthirties through McCarthyism, Ad Reinhardt was also involved in the workers' movement. Rosalind Bengelsdorf, his comrade, saw abstract painting as part of the broader effort to bring forth a better world. The Armenian-American abstractionist Arshile Gorky was a staunch Stalinist until his suicide in 1948, one of the few to stay loyal after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, but was apprehensive of any public affiliation.

James Graham, né Ivan Dombrowsky, gave the most thoroughgoing justification of abstract art of anyone in the New York scene. Perhaps no other figure charted such a strange course: a former foot soldier for the tsar, he fought in the White Army in 1918 before emigrating to the US in 1920, whereupon he adopted a rather eccentric blend of Freudo-Marxism amidst the Depression. Later he returned to anticommunist beliefs, subscribing to mysticism after World War II. Graham's *System and Dialectics of Art*, compiled between 1927 and 1936, was profoundly influenced by the writings of the Marxist art historian Max Raphael. (At the time Raphael was living in Paris, which Graham visited often, but Schapiro would help him escape the Nazis to New York in 1940.) Raphael had written in 1933 that 'art has as its principle a socially determined content [...]. This is true even of the most abstract art, for

abstract art reflects the structure of present bourgeois society.' (Raphael 1980: 42) He did not mean this as a reproach to abstract art, but instead an accurate description of its content. Using the framework laid out in this essay, one might read Raphael here as tacitly alluding to art's reflection of the real abstraction of labor under capitalism.

System and Dialectics of Art is a bizarre text, covering everything from the interaction of subjective and objective elements in art to time and space, revolution and society, genius and taste, etc. For Graham, 'art in general is a social manifestation.' (Graham 1971: 94) Often he would mention Marx and Picasso in the same breath (Ibid: 139), or Marx and Cézanne (Ibid: 113). Many of these approving references were excised in subsequent reissues, but Graham's dedication to abstract painting never wavered. Indeed, in the first version of *System and Dialectics of Art*, he even saw abstraction as providing a positive impulse to enact social change:

'Give the masses good art and do not worry about them understanding it. Even if the masses do not understand modern art in the least, this is no excuse for giving them bad art. Were it a question of giving the farmer an antiquated handmade plough which he understands, or a tractor which he does not understand, you would not hesitate in your choice. The masses want and desire to be educated up to the highest standards, and not catered down to. Academico-impressionist art methods regardless of subject matter just lull the masses gently to sleep, precisely the aim of the capitalist state. Abstract art with its revolutionary methods stirs their imagination—negatively at first, so as to gather speed—to thinking and consequently to action.' (Ibid: 137)

Quite far from embracing naïve Stalinist realism, Graham doubled down on the need for abstract art (which in his view was realistic and materialist anyway). Near the end of the document, he attacked the capitalist class and mainstream intellectuals as defenders of a dying order (Ibid: 197-8). His book, which openly called for the overthrow of existing conditions,[18] was widely read. Krasner and Gottlieb both owned copies.

Others would echo Graham's call for a broader dissemination of abstract art, even if they did not share his confidence in its ability to impel the masses to revolt. Greenberg, for

instance, defended it in his landmark 1939 essay 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' against the popularity of paintings by Norman Rockwell in the United States and Ilya Repin in Russia. To Greenberg, abstraction was the logical endpoint of modern aesthetics. 'It has been in search of the absolute that the avant-garde has arrived at "abstract" or "nonobjective" art,' he wrote (Greenberg 1986a: 8). Painters pursued means of expression unique to their medium, color and line applied to a flat surface, detached from any dependence on external objects. Formal experimentation aside, the content of these works can be seen to mirror the abstract qualities of capitalist life, in keeping with the interpretation advanced here. Artistic avant-gardes were made sociologically possible by the existence of 'bohemia' at the fringes of the art market, to which artists were banished after aristocratic patronage dried up. Yet capitalism simultaneously gave rise to a countervailing tendency, churning out endless pulp and conditioning viewers to enjoy it. During the interwar period, at least, it seemed to the Trotskyist Greenberg that aesthetic abstraction, though a product of this society, also pointed beyond it.[19]

Even into the 1960s, the great formalist critic continued to employ this general theoretical frame. Hilton Kramer observed that 'Greenberg's critical intelligence was forged in the crucible of Marxian dialectics, and long after he eschewed the illusions of Marxist ideology, his criticism drew upon the dialectical process which already determined his attitude toward culture and his habits of writing.' (Kramer 1973: 502) Clark has also underscored this dimension of Greenberg's thought, particularly in his historicization of the avant-garde's innovative strategies.[20] But Greenberg took it much further than this, going so far as to posit in 1945 a strict homology between the approaches of Mondrian and Marx to art and society:

'Mondrian's theories are logical deductions from the results of his own practice and from the evidence of the world around him, regarding the aesthetic and social implications of abstract art. With Marx, he anticipated the disappearance of works of art (painting, sculpture) once the material décor of life and life itself had become beautiful. With Marx, he viewed the true end of human striving as complete deliverance from the oppression of nature, inside and out. With Marx, he saw that man has to *denaturalize* himself and the things he deals with in order to realize his own nature. He saw that what is wrong at present is that man only partly

denaturalizes his own nature and environment, and through this partial denaturalization—capitalism, the suburbs, radio, vicarious pleasures, popular taste—attains the exact opposite of what he really wants.' (Greenberg 1986b: 19)[21]

All this will be taken up again in the last section, particularly as it pertains to the avant-garde attempt to overcome the separation of art and life. Encouraging 'more people to paint, to use and handle colors,' as Reinhardt did (in terms virtually identical to those of Greenberg),[22] would help to end the social division of labor that leaves artistic talent the sole preserve of a handful of geniuses. Not unlike Marx had argued a century earlier:

The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass, is a result of the division of labor. Even if in certain social conditions, everyone were an excellent painter, that would by no means exclude the possibility of each of them being also an original painter. Regardless, with the communist organization of society disappears the subordination of the individual to some specific art, which makes him a painter, sculptor, etc. (the names of which suggest the narrowness of his profession). Under communism, there can be no painters—only those who engage in painting, among other activities.' (Marx and Engels 1975: 394)

By virtue of their politicization and passing familiarity with the theories of Marx, the Trotskyists and assorted communists in New York were best positioned to understand the historical significance of abstract art. Over the course of the forties, most of them would be depoliticized or succumb to Cold War-style liberalism, a realignment Guilbaut described in painstaking detail as 'the de-Marxization of the intelligentsia.'[23] Still, for a time they were able to grasp aesthetic abstraction as being at once the product of capitalist social relations and the promise of a rationalized society just around the corner, as soon as these same relations were overcome.

No one was more attuned to the antinomies of abstract art in America than Robert Motherwell, far and away the most philosophically astute of the New York painters. He was sensitive to the shift that had taken place at the level of reality, and the tensions that existed between individual artists and revolutionary social movements. Writing in the pages of

DYN, an international journal edited by the Viennese-Jewish Trotskyist and Abstraction-Création veteran Wolfgang Paalen, Motherwell touched upon some of the more intractable impasses of 'The Modern Painter's World.' From the proposition that 'the function of the artist is to express reality as felt,' it followed that

'the function of the *modern* artist is by definition the felt expression of modern reality. This implies that reality changes to some degree. This implication is the realization that history is "real," or, to reverse the proposition, that reality has an historical character. Perhaps Hegel was the first fully to feel this. With Marx this notion is coupled with the feeling of how *material* reality is [...]. It is because reality has an historical character that we feel the need for new art.' (Motherwell 2007: 27-8)

Motherwell sensed that the very contours of reality had changed, becoming increasingly abstract. As he saw it, artists formed 'a kind of *spiritual underground*' within this world, rejecting bourgeois values on the one hand while embracing individualism on the other (Ibid: 28-9). Once again, this connects with what was said earlier about art's spiritualization [*Vergeistigung*] of material conditions. Freedom in capitalist society—as Motherwell recognized, invoking the British Marxist Christopher Caudwell—is based on property relations. Separated from the artisanal context in which they had hitherto worked for centuries, painters now found themselves free from the oversight of feudal commissions (though not 'doubly-free,' as Marx said of the proletariat, since they did own the means with which to paint). Here for the first time they confronted 'the anxiety of the blank canvas,' without any of the stifling specifications of previous epochs. 'In the new system,' Shiner thus explains, 'the thing that makes the production of art "abstract labor" is the emphasis primarily valuing the creativity of the artist.'[24] Labor became more abstract and less concrete not only in the world at large, but in terms of artistic practices themselves, as Shiner shows elsewhere.[25]

Unmoored in this fashion, artists were nevertheless kept remote from workers by their peculiar situation, despite efforts to organize an 'art front' and link their struggles with those of the working class. By the middle of the twentieth century, Motherwell reckoned, both sides had reached the point of crisis: 'The weakness of socialists derives from the inertness

of the working class; the weakness of artists derives from their isolation. Weak as they are, it is these groups who provide the *opposition*.' (Motherwell 2007: 29) Many Trotskyists hoped that World War II would bring along with it the opportunity for the Stalinist political counterrevolution to be reversed in the USSR, and the possibility of social revolution in the US. Economics and aesthetics would be transfigured in one fell swoop. Yet this yearned-for outcome never came to pass, and abstract art in America turned into little more than a propaganda showpiece for the CIA. Geometricism was scorned in favor of lyricism—the most subjective, least objective flavor of abstraction. Very little was left after the war of the radicalism to which so much of the New York scene erstwhile adhered.

Towards a balance-sheet of the classical avant-garde

When Marx was finishing his dissertation on the difference between Epicurean and Democritean *Naturphilosophie*, he jotted down that the historic task ahead of mankind was to make the world philosophical. Hegel had completed philosophy, effectively bringing it to a close with his all-encompassing encyclopedia. Now all that was left was to make its ideals real, transforming the world in keeping with its program. 'As the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes worldly,' wrote Marx (Marx 1975: 85). Karl Korsch commented on these lines some eighty years later in his essay *Marxism and Philosophy*, maintaining: 'Philosophy cannot be abolished without being realized.' (Korsch 2008: 97) In other words, it is important not to cast philosophy unceremoniously aside simply because its time has passed. One must come to terms with it, critically engage it, before doing away with it *tout court*. Revolution was supposed to accomplish this world-historic task, but its failure to spread westward following the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 doomed philosophy to irreality. Critical theory, especially Adorno, must be read in this light. [26]

Yet this insight by Korsch into the place occupied by philosophy in the early thought of Marx, subsequently reaffirmed by Adorno, can be applied to art and religion as well. For Hegel, of course, art and religion each provided an imperfect window onto the absolute. Art reigned supreme in the ancient world, while religion dominated medieval life. By the time Hegel was writing, however, these modes of accessing the absolute had been surpassed by

philosophy, rationally comprehending the idea in its spiritual movement. Intuition and representation had been supplanted by knowledge or science [*Wissenschaft*], achieved in Hegel's system. Unfortunately this achievement did not last long, as the disciples of this system battled for its possession after his death in 1831. Marx alone succeeded in carrying it forward, precisely by pointing out that philosophy had to be overcome. The same goes for those previous modes which took the absolute as their highest object, art and religion. Leaving aside for now the question of religion (Wolfe 2020), the avant-garde project of dissolving art into life can be interpreted as an effort to make the world artistic, akin to the call to make the world philosophical: or, better still, to make the world into a work of art.

Peter Bürger would describe this as the mission of the modern movement—'to reintegrate art into the praxis of life,' as was epitomized by the constructivists in this essay. He argued that 'art's detachment from the context of practical life' had occurred historically, namely with the development of bourgeois society. Drawing explicitly upon Arvatov's *Art and Production*, Bürger broke up the periodization as follows: 1.) sacral art, the art of the First Estate; 2.) courtly art, the art of the Second Estate; and finally 3.) bourgeois art, the art of the Third Estate (Bürger 1984: 47-8). Strangely, this lines up with Shiner's schema, which has 'art' in its modern sense as a relatively recent invention, no more than a few centuries old. '(Fine) art, as we have generally understood it,' Shiner maintains, 'is neither eternal nor ancient but an historical construction of the eighteenth century.' (Shiner 2001: 307) Only with the separation of the artist from traditional communitarian forms of life does originality become valued above all and the cult of the genius arise, alongside abstract labor and mediation by market forces. Romanticism in the first half of the nineteenth century gave way to the avant-garde in the second, with the latter pursuing the determinate negation of the place to which art had been relegated within capitalism:

European avant-garde movements may be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men [...] Avant-gardistes viewed its dissociation from the praxis of life as the dominant characteristic of art in bourgeois society [...]. The avant-gardistes therefore proposed the sublation of art—sublation in the Hegelian sense of the term: art was not to be simply destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life

where it would be preserved, albeit in a changed form. In so doing, they adopted an essential element of aestheticism [i.e., the slogan of *l'art pour l'art*]: distance from the praxis of life was to be the true content of artworks. For the praxis of life to which aestheticism refers and which it negates is the means-ends rationality of the bourgeois everyday. Now, it is not the aim of the avant-gardistes to integrate art into this praxis. Quite the contrary: they assent to the aestheticists' rejection of the world and its instrumental reason, distinguishing themselves through their attempt to organize a new life praxis on the basis of art.' (Bürger 1984: 48)

Mondrian seemingly grasped the significance of this shift when he wrote that 'abstract-real painting serves as an evolution toward *nonart*—the end of art as we now know it today—as something that expresses life but which is not yet *life itself*. Once art is transformed into real life, our art will come to an end.' (Mondrian 1993a: 46) Just as conceptual abstractions both reflect the real abstraction of labor and yet might aid in a transition beyond capitalism, so too would aesthetic abstractions play a role in creating a socialist society despite deriving from capitalist relations. Science and mathematics, for instance, doubtless are rooted in abstract modes of thought nourished by the social calculation of homogeneous labor-time, but could help contribute to the creation of an emancipated world no less than forces of production cultivated under capitalism. Because abstract art, which sought to purify the various media (painting, sculpture) in which artists worked, unwittingly reflects the reality of abstract labor, it may be deemed an inappropriate means to overcome a productive system predicated upon such labor. Communism will depend in no small part on the repurposing of tools and implements and even ways of thinking devised under capitalism, so this hardly invalidates it.

Herbert Marcuse claimed that with the liberation of the imaginative faculty, the human lifeworld could be remade using the accumulated knowledge of the arts and sciences. 'Released from bondage to exploitation, the imagination, sustained by the achievements of science, would turn its productive energies to the radical reconstruction of experience,' he wrote. 'In this reconstruction, the historical *topos* of the aesthetic changes, finding expression in the transformation of the *Lebenswelt*—society as a work of art.' (Marcuse 2000: 45) For Marcuse, this involved overcoming Art as such: 'Art would become an

integral factor in the quality and "appearance" of things, in shaping reality and everyday life. This would mean the *Aufhebung* of art, an end to the segregation of the aesthetic from the real.' (Ibid: 31-2) Lefebvre adopted a similar stance in his *Introduction to Modernity*, arguing that '[i]f art as a specialized activity brought with it specific alienations, then the supersession of art and its emergence as a global *praxis* will bring with it an aesthetic fulfillment that is far loftier than the mere satisfaction of needs. Given that this would be generalized by the total reintegration of art into life, the man of the future could enjoy the Earth as if it were a work of art.' (Lefebvre 1995: 143) Very much as it was with philosophy, as detailed above, the abolition of art would simultaneously entail its realization in life.

Despite the perversity of his thesis about the continuity of Stalinist realism with the earlier Soviet avant-garde, the postcommunist art theorist Boris Groys is correct that '[t]he world promised by the leaders of the October Revolution was not merely a more just one or one that would provide greater economic security. Perhaps in even greater measure, it was meant to be beautiful: the unordered and chaotic life of past ages was to be replaced by a life that was harmonious and organized according to a unitary artistic plan.'[27] World revolution would have allowed for the rational reordering of society, the fusion of art with life on a global scale. Even the form of avenues and neighborhoods could then be modified in accordance with abstract aesthetic principles, as advocated by the proto-abstractionist Léger in his polychrome vision. Years later he recalled meeting Trotsky on furlough in Montparnasse and discussing 'the thrilling problem of a multicolored city.' Supposedly, the Bolshevik exile wanted the painter to accompany him to Moscow after the overthrow of capitalism 'because the prospect of a blue street and a yellow street piqued his enthusiasm.' (Léger 1958: 43) Of all the avant-garde tendencies that vied for dominance during the interwar period, constructivism went the furthest in identifying itself with a revolutionary cause.

Lenin, who by his own admission was far too stuffy and conservative to appreciate nonfigurative art,[28] would thus figure into all sorts of avant-garde posters and designs. Klutsis had a cutout of him strolling across a suprematist plane holding a transmission tower in his arms, while Lissitzky created a collage with him inside a stylized tribune. Both works appeared in Lenin's lifetime, dated 1920. 'I am certainly not radical enough,' he had told the

Romanian Marxist and dadaist poet Valeriu Marcu in Zurich four years earlier. 'You can never be radical enough; you must always try to be as radical as reality itself.' (Marcu 1943) Reality can be quite radical indeed: not just an index of inertia, but a dynamic motion carrying its own undoing in tow. Aesthetic abstraction gave sensuous form to the real abstraction of labor at the heart of capitalist society, but also pointed beyond this society (and beyond art as such) to the revolutionary reorganization of everyday life. 'To avantgardistes, reality itself is material for construction,' explains Groys (Groys 2011: 21). However briefly, the different strands of painterly and sculptural abstraction throughout Europe would be drawn into a single radical current aiming at the dawn of a 'new man': international constructivism.[29]

Nonetheless, the revolution that broke out in 1917 was contained by 1923. Similar to philosophy, the moment of art's potential realization was thus missed. Formally, art reached its highest point with abstraction—after which it was supposed to merge with life. Unable to accomplish this goal absent a successful world revolution, abstract art continued to gain adherents even if the barrier between art and life remained. Painters still innovated at the Bauhaus and Vkhutemas, among other places; much work yet lay ahead. Why was the interwar era such a period of creative ferment, though, if the reason behind this artistic radicalism had come and gone? Many artists felt hemmed in by Nazism from the right and Stalinism from the left. It is perhaps useful to treat these lingering formal innovations as aftershocks of the earthquake that shook the world in 1917. The old Marxist notion of 'cultural lag' helps explain how superstructural phenomena, reacting slowly to the material base, can often outlast their original impetus.[30] Cultural lag—or 'that ever sluggish revolution of the superstructure,' (Adorno 2002: 29) as Adorno put it—accounts for the persistent vitality of the artistic avant-garde long after the political vanguard was overrun by violent counterrevolution.

By the postwar period, however, any residual radicalism that clung to avant-garde art would soon be snuffed out. Ever wary of capitalism's ability to neutralize and recuperate potentially 'subversive' content, Adorno further observed: 'Now that American hotels are decorated with abstract paintings à *la manière de* ... and aesthetic radicalism has proved to be socially affordable, radicalism must finally pay the price of no longer being radical.'

(Ibid) Debord was even more pessimistic about the possibility of fundamental change resulting from the avant-garde's activity, while noting the way it had modeled itself on political vanguard formations.[31] Paul Mattick alludes to the difference between Debord and Adorno on this issue in the first volume of *Cured Quail*.[32] Adorno and Debord started from nearly identical premises, Anselm Jappe has explained, but the latter concluded that high art had exhausted its capacity to serve as a site of resistance, whereas the former held out hope that it still could.[33] Jappe points out that when Adorno defended modernism, he was almost invariably referring to works produced between 1910 and 1930, and that after this he ended up effectively espousing the exhaustion of art. Still, he remained ambivalent regarding the idea of the death of art since its political significance was gone.[34]

Others had also warned that even the most extreme avant-garde artworks would sooner or later be commodified. 'Combining repression and encouragement, boycott and flattery, bourgeois society has been able to assimilate every 'rebel' art movement,' Trotsky wrote in a 1938 letter to the *Partisan Review* (Trotsky 1977: 105). Fifteen years earlier, in the aftermath of civil war, he had expressed the consensus view that the postrevolutionary aesthetic would be 'realistic.' Yet he defined this term rather loosely: it would not necessarily be characterized by its lifelike representation of visual reality.[35] If one recalls that the *Realistic Manifesto* of Gabo and Pevsner was published around this time, one gets a sense of just how elastic the concept could be. Regardless, it is clear from Trotsky's subsequent reflections that he was disgusted by the socialist realism that eventually emerged under Stalin.[36] He never endorsed abstract art explicitly, though his supporters in New York certainly did, but in light of the argument advanced in this essay aesthetic abstraction might be considered a kind of realism. Viktor Shklovsky, who took part in a spirited debate with Trotsky in the early twenties, argued in 1964 that abstract artists were seeking the real:

'Abstract painting first appeared in Russia about 1912-1913, created by hungry artists who never sold any of their work. Much has changed in the last fifty years. Back then, that way didn't usually lead to success; today it is covered in potholes left by the wheels of epigones. Why has the invention of Russian leftist artists over half a century ago become almost official art in today's United States? Yet the thing recently canonized in the United States is not the same as the one invented five decades ago [...]. Early abstract art existed against the

backdrop of bourgeois art, a sweetened depiction of life that it rejected. Leftwing art at that time was not "realist," but its theorists are not to be confused with today's abstractionists, either. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, many were just seeking a way from the abstract to the real [*iz abstraktnogo k real'nomu*].' (Shklovsky 2017: 241)

Just going from this, Bürger seems to have been vindicated in his rather peremptory judgment about the tragedy of early twentieth century artistic movements compared with their farcical mid twentieth century successors. 'Since now the protest of the historical avant-garde against art as an institution is accepted as art, the gesture of protest of the neoavant-garde becomes inauthentic,' he explained (Bürger 1984: 53). 'Neo-avant-gardiste art is "autonomous" art in the full sense of the term, which means that it negates the avantgardiste intention of returning art to the praxis of life.' (Ibid: 58) Despite the best efforts of critics like Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh to defend the neo-avant-garde from heavyhanded dismissals such as this, Bürger's point ultimately stands. Arthur Danto, though not a Marxist in the least, was compelled to admit something similar. 'Only later did abstract paintings become objects of aesthetic delectation or formal pleasure,' commented Danto. 'The fact that we can now look at them without taking a political stand or feeling our spirit awakened—that we see them merely as art, and art itself as something we go to museums to see—is a sign of a transformation very different from the one hoped for by the movement's founders. Abstraction, which set out to change the world and redeem the human spirit, ended merely filling the museums.' (Danto 2000: 197)

Today it is difficult to avoid the impression that art should have ended a century ago, or ought at the very least to have been integrated into life. Perhaps it did indeed end, just not in the manner avant-garde artists intended. For at present it ekes out a sickly, institutionalized existence, divorced from any kind of 'real movement,' or else is so diffuse that anything and everything can be considered art. Yet the world was not made more beautiful in the process. Lacking agency of its own, art is adrift, awaiting felicitous tides to carry it home.

Notes

- [1.] Robert Delaunay likewise lamented at a 1939 talk that 'people use imprecise words when they speak of the "abstract," the "concrete," the "nonfigurative," etc.—there is reality, and nothing else.' (Delaunay 1978c: 154)
- [2.] 'Mondrian must have had [abstract art's reality] in mind when he remarked, "Squares? I see no squares in my pictures," which led him at the end of his life to speak of his art as a new realism.' (Motherwell 1996: 126)
- [3.] 'The parable of the constructivists in Lenin's car suggests a certain proximity [of the avant-garde] to revolution: not to the idea of revolution, but revolution as a concrete reality. And it further suggests that the destiny of the avant-garde was tied to revolution's failure.' (Spaulding 2014)
- [4.] 'Since the abstract form that represents the immanent value of objects takes the form of mathematical precision and unequivocal rational accuracy, its characteristics must reflect upon the objects themselves. If the art of a period gradually determines how we look at nature, and the artist's spontaneous subjective abstraction from reality forms our apparently immediate sensuous picture of nature, so does the superstructure of money relations erected above qualitative reality radically determine the image of reality.' (Simmel 2004: 450) Artists, too, are products of society, and the idea that art is just an *imitatio naturae* is itself ideological. The artistic representation of nature likewise reflects social relations.
- [5.] Various other scholars—from Franz Borkenau to Boris Hessen and Henryk Grossmann—have also made the case that economic abstractions paved the way for past scientific breakthroughs. 'Manufacture plays the role of a model [*Vorbild*] for science, insofar as the process of manufacturing is characterized by a thoroughgoing abstraction from everything qualitative. Galileo, the greatest classical writer on physics during the period of manufacture, treats only the laws of abstract labor in his *Discorsi*.' (Borkenau 1987: 110) See also Boris Hessen and Henryk Grossmann, who disagreed somewhat with Borkenau. (Hessen and Grossmann 1998) More recently, see Seaford 2004 and Hadden 1994.
- [6.] Sohn-Rethel underscores that this 'non-empirical' abstraction was common to both art and science: 'It was [Dürer's] declared aim to ground art—not just his own, but art in general—on a non-empirical canon of form which by its nature could stem from nothing other than the real abstraction of social synthesis, and which throughout the entire precapitalist epoch related to both art and the emerging natural sciences as a still unseparated, or inseparable, unity. One can say neither of Dürer, nor Leonardo, nor Piero,

nor Fra Giocondo whether they belong to the development of art or of natural science.' (Sohn-Rethel 2018)

- [7.] 'When I speak of the social bases of art, I do not mean to reduce art to economics or sociology or politics. Art has its own conditions that distinguish it from other activities, operating with special materials according to general psychological laws. But from such factors we could never understand the great diversity of art: why there is one style at one time, and another a generation later, why in certain cultures there is little change for hundreds of years, in other cultures not only a mobility from year to year but various styles of art at the same moment. If in a given country individuals differ from each other constantly, their works produced at the same time are more alike than works of individuals separated by centuries. This common character, which unites the art of individuals at a given time and place, is hardly due to a connivance of the artists.' (Schapiro 1999a: 119) [8.] 'The aesthetic concept of spirit [*Geist*] has been severely compromised not just by idealism, but also by writings dating from the nascence of radical modernism, among them those of Kandinsky. In his justified revolt against sensualism [...] he isolated the contrary of this principle and reified it such that it became difficult to distinguish the "You should believe in spirit" from superstition and an arts-and-crafts enthusiasm for the exalted.' (Adorno 2002: 87)
- [9.] In other words, by 'the reality men have created and "made," a kind of second nature.' (Lukács 1971: 128)
- [10.] 'Is not Gauguin an example of those ancients who live among us, dress like us, and speak our own language? When we read about the life of this Peruvian bourgeois, we discover a clever stockbroker, punctual, contented, yet enclosed by his Danish wife in a comfortable existence, looking at others' paintings more with pleasure than personal concern. Gradually, he becomes disgusted with the abstractions of money and figures. It is not enough for him to speculate on the graphs of the Exchange or to play with numbers. He has to paint, because this allows him to reconquer eternal antiquity. Destiny pushes him toward wild and savage regions, to Brittany and Oceania, where immobile strata of the centuries remain.' (Focillon 1992: 170) Compare with Gaugin's January 14, 1885 letter to Schuffenecker: 'Do not copy too much from nature. Art is an abstraction [*l'art est une abstraction*]. Extract this abstraction from nature while you are dreaming, and think of the creation which will result.' (Gauguin 1996: 22)

- [11.] 'Picasso supplied the "vision" the existing world implied and awaited, in parallel with imperialism and the world war, with the Bauhaus and abstract space as well.' (Lefebvre 1991: 302)
- [12.] 'The new realism in painting is very much realism in painting, for it contains no realism of mountains, sky, water. Until now there was a realism of objects, but not of painted units of color.' (Malevich 1971: 38)
- [13.] Later historians would contest this timeline, discovering it to have been backdated from July 1915. This indicates the path Malevich took to nonobjective art was even more arduous than he let on (c.f. Shatskikh 2012: 33-53).
- [14.] 'The two currents that marked the end of modern art were dadaism and surrealism. Although only partially conscious of it, they paralleled the proletarian revolutionary movement's last great offensive; and the halting of that movement, which left them trapped within the very artistic sphere that they had declared dead and buried, was the basic cause of their own immobilization. Historically, dadaism and surrealism are at once bound up with one another and at odds with one another. This antagonism, involvement in which constituted for each of these movements the most consistent and radical aspect of its contribution, also attested to the internal deficiency in each's critique—namely, in both cases, a fatal one-sidedness. For dadaism sought to abolish art without realizing it, and surrealism sought *to realize art without abolishing it* [...] The abolition and the realization of art are inseparable aspects of a single transcendence of art.' (Debord 1995: 136) [15.] He admitted as much in a letter: 'I know very little of the constructivist avant-garde between the two world wars. Without doubt I neglected it as a purely plastic research, which excuses nothing: in the period preceding the Report [on the Construction of Situations], I had a tendency to summarily regard the entire Kandinsky-Mondrian phase as being already attained and summarized by Malevich's famous square.' (Debord 1999: 201.)
- [16.] Years later, Gan would have to pay for his acid tongue, arrested in 1941 for publicly cursing Stalin's name and summarily shot in 1942.
- [17.] Its editors advocated the entry of art into life and asserted 'the inseparability of the problems of art and the problems of society.' (Żarnowerówna and Szczuka 1974: 106).
- [18.] 'In class revolution not only the subject matter is changed by violence, but mainly the methods change. The same in art.' (Graham 1971: 173)
- [19.] 'Capitalism in decline finds that whatever of quality it is still capable of producing

becomes almost invariably a threat to its own existence. Advances in culture, no less than advances in science and industry, corrode the very society under whose aegis they are made possible. Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word.' (Greenberg 1986a: 22)

- [20.] Clark disagrees with some aspects of Greenberg's theory of modernism, but is deeply appreciative of the Marxist side (Clark 1982: 139-43).
- [21.] Reinhardt had voiced the same sentiment in an unpublished talk about 'Abstraction vs. Illustration' two years prior. Greenberg was likely paraphrasing him, having attended it. [22.] Compare the above lines with Reinhardt's lecture notes: 'The way to truly enrich or socialize painting is to get more and more people to paint, to use and handle colors—not to acquire skills of illustration. Mondrian, like Marx, foresaw the disappearance of works of art when [a beautiful] environment itself became an aesthetic reality. In its dissatisfaction with ordinary experience, the impoverished reality of present-day society, an abstract painting stands as a challenge to disorder and disintegration; it implies a conviction of something constructive in our own time.' (Reinhardt 1975: 49)
- [23.] See the chapter 'New York, 1935-1941: The De-Marxization of the Intelligentsia' in Guilbaut 1983: 17-48.
- [24.] 'Prior to the eighteenth century, the subjects of paintings were commissioned, and very often the artist had a contract. One of my favorite examples is Leonardo, whom today we think of as a great independent artist and genius. However, he had a contract for *Virgin of the Rocks* that not only specified the subject matter of his work, but also the color of the virgin's robe, the date of delivery, a guarantee of repairs, and so on. This is unthinkable for an artist with an independent practice working in the twentieth or twenty-first century. Turning out pieces that are intended for a particular purpose—and very often for a particular place—does not match our notion of the freewheeling modern artist.' (Shiner 2014: 2) [25.] 'The transition from patronage to the market as a move from "concrete labor" to "abstract labor" [was] necessitated by the shift from use value to exchange value. In the older system of art, the producer's labor was concrete in the sense that facility, intelligence, and inventiveness were employed in executing a commission which often had a specific use and an agreed-upon subject matter. In the emerging market system, labor becomes abstract in the sense that it has no tie to a specific place or purpose, no predetermined subject matter and thus no specific tasks of execution but only a generalized creativity.' (Shiner 2001: 127-

- [26.] Adorno's opening to *Negative Dialectics* was an extension of Korsch's essay: 'Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed.' (Adorno 2007: 3)
- [27.] Groys' argument, which is not totally implausible, is that the Soviet avant-garde's totalitarian aesthetic ambitions paved the way for socialist realism as the style officially mandated by Stalin. (Groys 2011: 3)
- [28.] Lenin made a surprise visit in February 1921 to the Moscow school Vkhutemas. 'He arrived one night unannounced and spoke with students who innocently expressed their enthusiasm for "futurist" art: "We will get the literature for you, Vladimir Ilyich; we are sure that you, too, will be a futurist. It is impossible for you to be on the side of that rotten old trash." Lenin responded by turning a student's nonrepresentational drawing round and round, asking: "Well, how do you connect art with politics?" When students praised Mayakovsky's *Mystery-Bouffe* and Kamensky's *Engine Mass*, while stating proudly that they never went to the traditional opera, Lenin said, apparently with good humor: "Well, tastes differ" and "I am an old man".' (Buck-Morss 2002: 301)
- [29.] 'It is frequently complained that abstract art fails to maintain contact with humanity, that man cannot identify his most profound emotions and his most soaring ambitions with a type of artistic expression which restricts itself to the purity of geometrical form. What can be stated categorically about constructivism is that it rejects the comfortable assumption of a "given" harmony between human feeling and the outside world [...] Rather it implies that man imposes order on the world, and that artists should play a central role in determining the type of order imposed.' (Bann 1974: xix)
- [30.] "Cultural lag" means that at the present time life depends on material factors, and that change occurs more quickly in areas immediately related to the economy than in cultural spheres.' (Horkheimer 1972: 65)
- [31.] 'The very idea of a collective avant-garde, with the militant aspect that it brings, is a fairly recent product of historical conditions that are leading simultaneously to the need for a consistent revolutionary cultural program, and to the need to struggle against the forces that are preventing the development of this program. Such groups are led to transpose a few of the organizational methods created by revolutionary politics into their own sphere of activity, and in the future their actions will no longer be able to be conceived without some

link to political critique. In this respect, there is a noticeable advance from futurism, dadaism, and surrealism to movements formed after 1945. All the same, however, one discovers at each stage the same universal will for change and the same quick breakup when the incapacity to change the real world profoundly enough leads to a defensive withdrawal.' (Debord 2002: 31-2)

- [32.] 'The concept of "spectacle" is also a version of the critique of "mass culture" central to the dour view of contemporary society shared by a range of ex-leftists, from Dwight Macdonald and Clement Greenberg to Theodor W. Adorno. Where they differ is in Debord's abandonment of "high art" as a realm of resistance to commodity culture; in his view, with the artworld success of surrealism in the late 1920s, art itself had become part of the dominant spectacle.' (Mattick 2018)
- [33.] 'Adorno and Debord came in the sixties to epitomize two diametrically opposed views on "the end of art." Adorno defended art against those who sought to "transcend" it in favor of a direct intervention in reality, or who preached "commitment" in art; Debord was meanwhile announcing that the time had come to *realize in life* what had hitherto been merely *promised in art*. Debord nevertheless saw the *negation* of art, through the transcendence of its separation from life's other aspects, as a continuation of modern art's critical role, whereas for Adorno the critical function of art was still guaranteed precisely by its separation from the rest of life.' (Jappe 2018: 1289)
- [34.] 'The lie in the intellectuals' proclamation of the end of art resides in their question as to what the point is of art, what its legitimation is vis-à-vis contemporary praxis. But the function of art in a totally functional world is its functionlessness; it is pure superstition to believe that art could intervene directly or lead to an intervention. [...] Just how little this is the time for the abolition of art is apparent in its concretely open yet untried possibilities, which languish as if under a spell. Even when art in protest works itself free it remains unfree, for even the protest is constrained. Clearly it would be miserable apologetics to claim that the end of art cannot be envisioned. In response, art can do no better than close its eyes and grit its teeth.' (Adorno 2002: 320-1)
- [35.] 'What is understood by the term "realism"? By various methods in different historical periods, realism gave expression to the feelings and needs of social groups, in each case subject to a separate material definition and formal estimation. Do these realistic schools have anything in common? A feeling for life [stemlenie etu zhizn'], perhaps. Realism

consists in an artistic acceptance of reality, in picturing life as it is or idealizing it, justifying or condemning it, photographing or symbolizing it, always preoccupied with life in all three dimensions as a sufficient and invaluable theme for art. In the broad philosophical sense, then, and not in the narrow sense of a literary school, one may say with great certainty that the new art will be a realistic one.' (Trotsky 2005: 192-3)

[36.] 'Official Soviet painting today is called "socialist realism"; evidently the name was made up by a high-level functionary. Its "realism" consists in the imitation of provincial daguerreotypes from the third quarter of the nineteenth century, while the "socialist" character apparently consists in representing events that never took place.' (Trotsky 1977: 109)

Bibliography

Adorno, T.W. (2000) *Introduction to Sociology*, trans. E. Jephcott, Stanford University Press.

Adorno, T.W. (2001) *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. R. Livingstone, Stanford University Press.

Adorno, T.W. (2002) *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentor, Continuum.

Adorno, T.W. (2003a) 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society? The Fundamental Question of the Present Structure of Society', *Can One Live after Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader*, trans. R. Livingstone, Stanford University Press.

Adorno, T.W. (2003b) 'Reflections on Class Theory', *Can One Live after Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader*, trans. R. Livingstone, Stanford University Press.

Adorno, T.W. (2007) *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, Continuum.

Apollinaire, G. (2008) 'Aesthetic Meditations on Painting: The Cubist Painters' [1913], trans. J. M. Todd, *A Cubism Reader: Documents and Criticism*, 1906-1914, University of

Chicago Press.

Arvatov, B. (1974) 'Art and Class' [1923], trans. J. Bowlt, *The Tradition of Constructivism*, The Viking Press.

Arvatov, B. (2017) 'Art and Production' [1926], trans. S. Avagyan, Pluto Press.

Badiou, A. (2007) *The Century*, trans. A. Toscano, Polity Press.

Bann, S. (1974) 'Constructivism and the New Man' [1971], *The Tradition of Constructivism*, The Viking Press.

Barr Jr., A. (1936) Cubism and Abstract Art, Museum of Modern Art.

Berger, J. (2015) Portraits: On Artists, Verso.

Berlewi, H. (2002) 'The Arts Abroad' [1922-1923], trans. W. Kemp-Welch, *Between Two Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes*, 1910-1930, MIT Press.

Boccioni, U. (2009) 'The Plastic Foundations of Futurist Sculpture and Painting' [1913], trans. L. Rainey, *Futurism: An Anthology*, Yale University Press.

Buck-Morss, S. (2002) *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, MIT Press.

Bois, Y.A. (1990) Painting as Model, MIT Press.

Borkenau, F. (1987) 'The Sociology of the Mechanistic World-Picture' [1932]' trans. R. Hadden, *Science in Context*, Vol. I(1)(March).

Bürger, P. (1984) *Theory of the Avant-Garde* [1972], trans. M. Shaw, University of Minnesota Press.

Clark, T.J. (1982) 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art', *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Sept): 139-156.

Clark, T.J. (1999) Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism, Yale University Press.

Danto, A. (2000) 'Abstraction', *Madonna of the Future: Essays in a Pluralistic Art World*, Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux.

Daval, J.L. (1988) History of Abstract Painting, trans. J. Brenton, Hazan.

Debord, G. (1995) *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, Zone Books.

Debord, G. (1999) 'Letter to Constant [March 3, 1959]', *Correspondance*, Vol. 1: juin 1957-août 1960, Librairie Arthème Fayard.

Debord, G. (2002) 'Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency' [1957], trans. T. McDonough, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, MIT Press.

Delaunay, R. (1978a) 'A Note on the Construction of Reality in Pure Painting' [1913], trans. A. A. Cohen, *The New Art of Color*, The Viking Press.

Delaunay, R. (1978b) 'Concerning Impressionism' [1934], trans. A. A. Cohen, *The New Art of Color*, The Viking Press.

Delaunay, R. (1978c) 'Picasso, Matisse, and the New Reality' [1939], trans. A. A. Cohen, *The New Art of Color*, The Viking Press.

Ehrenburg, I. and Lissitzky, E. (1974) 'The Blockade of Russia is Coming to an End'

[1922], trans. S. Bann, *The Tradition of Constructivism*, The Viking Press.

Focillon, H. (1992) The Life of Forms, trans. G. Kubler, Zone Books.

Gabo, N. and Pevsner, A. (1976) 'Realistic Manifesto' [1920], trans. J. Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, The Viking Press.

Gan, A. (2013), Constructivism [1922], trans. C. Lodder, Tenov.

Gauguin, P. (1996) *Writings of a Savage*, trans. E. Levieux, Da Capo Press.

Giedion, S. (2008) *Space, Time, and Architecture: Growth of a New Tradition*, Harvard University Press.

Goldstein, L. (1988) *The Social and Cultural Roots of Linear Perspective*, MEP Publications.

Graham, J. (1971) System and Dialectics of Art, Johns Hopkins Press.

Greenberg, C. (1986a) 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' [1939], *Collected Essays and Criticism*, *Volume 1: Perceptions and Judgments*, 1938-1944, University of Chicago Press.

Greenberg, C. (1986b) 'Review of an Exhibition of Hans Hofmann and a Reconsideration of Mondrian's Theories' [1945], *Collected Essays and Criticism*, *Volume 2*, University of Chicago Press.

Greenberg, C. (1989) 'The Late Thirties in New York', Art and Culture: *Critical Essays*, Beacon Press.

Grohmann, W. (1958) *Wassily Kandinsky: Life and Work*, trans. N. Guterman, Harry Abrams.

Groys, B. (2011) *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. C. Rougle, Verso.

Guilbaut, S. (1980) 'The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America: Greenberg, Pollock, or from Trotskyism to the New Liberalism of The Vital Center', trans. T. Repensek, *October* Vol. 15 (Winter).

Guilbaut, S. (1983) *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism*, *Freedom*, *and the Cold War*, trans. A. Goldhammer, University of Chicago Press.

Hadden, R. (1994) *On the Shoulders of Merchants: Exchange and the Mathematical Conception of Nature in Early Modern Europe*, SUNY Press.

Haftmann, W. (1973) *Painting in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1: An Analysis of the Artists and Their Work* [1965], trans. R. Manheim, Praeger Publishers.

Henry, M. (2009) Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky, trans. S. Davidson, Continuum.

Hessen, B. and Grossmann, H. (1998) *The Social and Economic Roots of the Scientific Revolution* [1931-1935], trans. G. Shalit and P. Shimrat, Springer.

Jappe, A. (2018) 'The Spectacle and the Culture Industry, the Transcendence of Art and the Autonomy of Art: Some Parallels between Theodor Adorno's and Guy Debord's Critical Concepts' [1999], trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, *Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, Sage Publications.

Horkheimer, M. (1972) 'Authority and the Family' [1934], trans. M. O'Connell, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, Continuum.

Kandinsky, W. (1994a) 'On the Spiritual in Art' [1911], trans. P. Vergo, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, Da Capo Press.

Kandinsky, W. (1994b) 'On the Question of Form' [1912], trans. P. Vergo, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, Da Capo Press.

Kandinsky, W. (1994c) 'Reminiscences' [1913], trans. P. Vergo, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, Da Capo Press.

Kandinsky, W. (1994d) 'Cologne Lecture' [1914], trans. P. Vergo, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, Da Capo Press.

Kandinsky, W. (1994e) 'Abstract or Concrete?' [1938], trans. P. Vergo, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, Da Capo Press.

Kracauer, S. (1960) *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Oxford University Press.

Kramer, H. (1973) 'A Critic on the Side of History: Notes on Clement Greenberg', *The Age of the Avant-Garde: An Art Chronicle of 1956-1972*, Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux.

Lefebvre, H. (1991) The Production of Space, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell.

Lefebvre, H. (1995) Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes, trans. J. Moore, Verso.

Léger, F. (1958) 'On Monumentality and Color' [1943], trans. S. Giedion, *Architecture*, *You and Me: Diary of a Development*, Harvard University Press.

Léger, F. (1973a) 'The Machine Aesthetic: The Manufactured Object, the Artisan, and the Artist' [1924], trans. A. Anderson, *Functions of Painting*, The Viking Press.

Lenin, V.I. (1964) 'The Position and Tasks of the Socialist International' [1914], *Collected Works, Volume 21*, Progress Publishers.

Lewis, N. (1989) 'Letter to James Yeargens' [1947], Norman Lewis: From the Harlem

Renaissance to Abstraction, Kenkeleba Gallery.

Lewis, N. (2006) 'Thesis' [1946], Reading Abstract Expressionism, Yale University Press.

Lissitzky, E. (2003) 'Letter to Kazimir Malevich' [1922], trans. Y. N. Petrova, *In Malevich's Circle: Confederates, Students, and Followers in Russia, 1920s-1950s*, Palace Editions.

Lodder, C. (1985) Russian Constructivism, Yale University Press.

Lukács, G. (1971) 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' [1923], trans. R. Livingstone, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, MIT Press.

Lukács, G. (1981) 'Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline' [1934], trans. D. Fernbach, *Essays on Realism*, MIT Press.

Malevich, K. (1971) 'From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism' [1915/1916], trans. X. Glowacki-Prus, *Essays on Art*, *1915-1933*, George Wittenborn.

Malevich, K. (2015) 'Letter to Mikhail Gershenzon' [1919], *Letters, Documents, Memoirs, Criticism, Volume 1*, Tate Publishing.

Marcu, V. (1943) 'Lenin in Zurich: A Memoir', in: Foreign Affairs Vol. 21, No. 3 (April).

Marcuse, H. (2000) An Essay on Liberation, Beacon Press.

Marx, K. (1975) 'The Difference Between the Epicurean and Democritean Philosophy of Nature' [1839-1841], trans. D. and S. Struik, *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, *Vol. 1*, International Publishers.

Marx, K. (1993) *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* [1856], trans. M. Nicolaus, Penguin.

Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1975) 'The German Ideology: Critique of Modern Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, and Max Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets' [1846], trans. C. Dutt, *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, *Vol. 5*, International Publishers.

Mattick P. (2003) Art in Its Time: Theories and Practices of Modern Aesthetics, Routledge.

Mattick, P. (2018) 'Do We Live in a Society of the Spectacle?', Cured Quail Volume 1.

Metzinger, J. and Gleizes, A. (2008) 'On Cubism' [1912], trans. J. M. Todd, *Cubism: Documents and Criticism*, 1906-1914, University of Chicago Press.

Moholy-Nagy, L. (1975) 'Constructivism and the Proletariat' [1922], *Architecture and Design*, *1890-1939: An International Anthology of Original Articles*, Watson-Guptill Publications.

Mondrian, P. (1993a) 'The New Plastic in Painting' [1917], trans. H. Holtzmann, *The New Art — The New Life: Collected Writings*, Da Capo Press.

Mondrian, P. (1993b) 'Dialogue on the New Plastic' [1919], trans. H. Holtzmann, *The New Art* — *The New Life: Collected Writings*, Da Capo Press.

Mondrian, P. (1993c) 'The New Art, the New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships' [1931], trans. H. Holtzmann, *The New Art — The New Life: Collected Writings*, Da Capo Press.

Motherwell, R. (1996) 'Abstract Art and the Real' [1949], *Collected Writings*, Oxford University Press.

Motherwell, R. (2007) 'The Modern Painter's World' [1944], *Writings*, University of California Press.

Murray, P. (2016) 'Marx's "Truly Social" Theory of Value, Part 2: How is Labor that is Under the Sway of Capital Actually Abstract?', *The Mismeasure of Wealth: Essays on Marx and Social Form*, Brill.

Picasso, P. (1972) 'Conversation with Christin Zervos' [1935], trans. M. Evans, *On Art: A Selection of Views*, The Viking Press.

Postone, M. (1993) *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge University Press.

Punin, N. (1974) 'Tatlin's Tower' [1920], trans. J. Bowlt, *The Tradition of Constructivism*, The Viking Press.

Raphael, M. (1980) *Proudhon, Marx, Picasso: Three Studies in the Sociology of Art*, trans. J. Tagg, Humanities Press.

Reinhardt, A. (1975) 'Abstraction vs. Illustration' [1943], *Art as Art: Selected Writings*, University of California Press.

Richter, H., Bauman, F., Eggeling, V. and Janco, M. (1974) 'Statement by the Constructivist Groups of Romania, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and Germany' [1922], trans. N. Bullock, *The Tradition of Constructivism*, The Viking Press.

Rodchenko, A. (2005) 'Constructivism as a Contemporary Worldview' [1921], trans. J. Gambrell, *Diaries, Essays, Letters, and Other Writings*, Museum of Modern Art.

Schapiro, M. (1978) 'The Nature of Abstract Art' [1937], *Modern Art: Selected Papers*, George Braziller.

Schapiro, M. (1999a) 'The Social Bases of Art' [1936], Worldview in Painting, Art, and Society: Selected Papers, George Braziller.

Schapiro, M. (1999b) 'The Value of Modern Art' [1948], *Worldview in Painting, Art, and Society: Selected Papers*, George Braziller.

Seaford, R. (2004) *Money and the Early Greek Mind: Homer, Philosophy, Tragedy,* Cambridge University Press.

Seuphor, M. (1964) Abstract Painting [1949], trans. M. Seuphor, Dell Publishing.

Shatskikh, A. (2012) *Black Square: Malevich and the Origins of Suprematism*, trans. M. Schwartz, Yale University Press.

Shiner, L. (2001) *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History*, University of Chicago Press.

Shiner, L. (2014) 'Art, a Modern Phenomenon: An Interview with Chris Mansour', *Platypus Review*, No. 67 (June).

Shklovsky, V. (2017) 'Once Upon a Time' [1964], trans. A. Berlina, *Selected Writings*, Bloomsbury Academic.

Simmel, G. (2004) *The Philosophy of Money* [1900/1907], trans. T. Bottomore, D. Frisby and K. Mengelberg, Routledge.

Sohn-Rethel, A. (1978) *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. M. Sohn-Rethel, Macmillan.

Sohn-Rethel, A. (2018) 'Formal Characteristics of Second Nature' [1974], trans. D. Spaulding, *Selva Journal* (July), .

Spaulding, D. (2014) 'Value-Form and Avant-Garde', Mute (March), .

Stepanova, V. (1988) 'On Constructivism' [1921], trans. J. E. Bowlt, *The Complete Work*, MIT Press.

Tarabukin, N. (1923) *Ot mol'berta k mashine*, Izdatel'stvo rabotnik prosveshcheniia.

Tatlin, V. (1988) 'On Teaching Activities at the Reformed Academy of Arts' [1918], trans. E. Lockwood, *Writings*, Rizzoli.

Teige, K. (2000) 'Constructivism and the Liquidation of "Art" [1925], trans. I. Žantovská Murray, *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia and Other Writings*, Getty Research Institute.

Torres-García, J. (2013) 'A Will to Construct' [1929], trans. L. Valeri, *Cercle et Carré and the International Spirit of Abstract Art*, University of Georgia Press.

Trotsky, L. (1970) *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* [1928], trans. J. Hansen, Pathfinder Press.

Trotsky, L. (1977) 'Art and Politics in Our Epoch' [1938], *On Literature and Art*, Pathfinder Press.

Trotsky, L. (2005) Literature and Revolution [1923], trans. R. Strunsky, Haymarket Books.

Wolfe, R. (2020) 'Religion in Russian Marxism', *Rethinking Marxism* Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jan): 6-40.

Worringer, W. (1997) *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* [1907], trans. M. Bullock, Elephant Press.

Żarnowerówna, T. and Szczuka, M. (1974) 'What Constructivism Is' [1924], trans. J. Bowlt, *The Tradition of Constructivism*, The Viking Press.

A Short Twenty-First Century

Paul Barrow

Some years ago, whilst precariously employed at a nearby contemporary art gallery, I'd spend my lunch hours walking around the National Gallery in London. Each time, the susurrous hiss of the traffic would be replaced by a bright festival of colour as I departed the soot-greyed streets and ascended the stairs to the Sainsbury Wing.

What started as a visit to Piera della Francesca's paintings, and a regular experience of temporal vertigo in front of a panel of Paulo Ucello's famed *The Battle of San Romano*, soon transformed into a tour of the early Sienese, Venetian and Florentine works followed by the Dutch interiors in Room 16.[1] Before long, my meandering expanded further and became a loop around the entire gallery. On the bus to work each morning, on the way home, and occasionally in the gallery itself, I was reading Giovanni Arrighi's singular study of the *longue durée* of capital, *The Long Twentieth Century*. I couldn't help but reflect, as the 171 bus carried me through the heave and swell of London's mornings and evenings,

For me, it all begins with the *Portrait of a Young Man* painted by Sandro Botticelli in Florence around 1480-85, and it was my visits to him as a starting point that so quickly acquired the force of habit.[2] I was struck not only by the openness of his gaze but also the apparent prescience of the date at which it was produced. For this boy, if he had lived, lived at the moment when the proto-systemic reign of the Medici was ending and the first real 'systemic cycle of accumulation' was taking off: the first 'long century'.

If we look at Arrighi's diagram of the long centuries, which is as perhaps as beautiful and eloquent as Botticelli's painting, we find he exists near *t0*: the first 'terminal crisis' of a systemic cycle of accumulation. (Arrighi 2010: 220) These cycles are Arrighi's 'long centuries', each one longer than an actual century, but shorter on each recurrence. Each one presided over by a new hegemon that rises out of the ashes of the former and profits and directs a new phase of expansion of the world economy. Preceded by a proto-cycle concluded by the Florentine supremacy in high finance, the four long centuries belong to the

Genoese, the Dutch, the British and, lately, the Americans. Each cycle passes like a year with its seasons. They have their 'spring' as the material economy expands, their 'autumn' as this expansion tapers off and capital withdraws from productive activities into the financial sphere, and finally their 'winter' – a prolonged 'terminal crisis' from which the regime *cannot recover*. In other words, Marx's general formula for capital, in which capital (M), goes in search of the commodity (C) in an unsustainable attempt to endlessly increase its magnitude (M - C - M'), also unfolds not merely in the everyday motion of capital but in the grander sweep of historical time. (Marx 1976: 247-57) The National Gallery itself was built during Britain's 'long nineteenth century' and, in its own way, is remarkable for its embodiment of the cycles which brought it about.

This young man faces us squarely amidst the conclusion of the Medici's reign over Florentine high-finance and at the chain-link moment where the productive M – C phase of the first proper cycle of systemic accumulation is taking off under the auspices of Genoese capital. In his time, from 1480 onwards, he would have likely witnessed the rise of the populist Savanorala, the city's books in flames, and perhaps even the Medici's restoration as a territorial aristocracy backed by the forces of Imperial Spain. In short, the end of his city and of his century.

His garments are urbane but simple, rendered with considerable attention and detail. Something about him looks surprisingly modern. Who was he? One of Botticelli's apprentices perhaps? I think of him stepping out of the duskiness of the workshop into the bright Florentine noon and savouring a moment of stillness at lunchtime in the city. He wouldn't have had coffee, but something must have got him through the day. Something about the way his shirt fastens at the collar is incredibly endearing, something about the way those clothes sit on his frame conjures a whole world-historical narrative that seems to scream out of the frame.

After all, the wool trade, and the production of wool garments, is where Arrighi has the nightmare of our own times begin. Early on in *The Long Twentieth Century*, he remarks that: 'The formation and expansion of Florentine networks of high finance were initially embedded in, and built on, the extensive and dense web of transactions created by the wool

trade' (Arrighi 2010: 98). It was a trade that stretched from the Italian city-states, up through Burgundy and France to the Netherlands and finally to the relative backwater that was England. Over a century before Botticelli's painting was created, a 140 year-long phase of financialisation began as the wool trade's growth rate began to slow and there was a massive withdrawal of Florentine capital from the lower-value levels of the cloth-production industry in Florence and into high-finance, culminating in massive deindustrialization of the city and the proletarian uprising known as the Revolt of the Ciompi in 1378. Its subsequent defeat in which capital's 'greater flexibility and mobility' outmaneuvered this early proletariat and made them powerless to stop 'the tendency that was making their existence "redundant" prefigures our conjuncture. (Ibid: 104) The Revolt of the Ciompi and the face of this young man bookend the conclusion of this early proto-cycle of the Italian city-states, the 'signal crisis' (as in, signaling the beginning of a financial expansion) and terminal crises respectively.

In his discussion of the Medici, Arrighi notes the enormous sums the family spent on the arts. Emerging after the 'great crash' of the 1340s that eventually lead to the Revolt of the Ciompi, a crash triggered by Edward III of England's default on his enormous loans from the Peruzzi and the Bardi families, the Medici banking clan filled the magnificent vacuum those families left behind. In doing so, their family name became a byword not only for cultural grandeur but the Italian Renaissance itself. If we allow ourselves to be dazzled, we might miss that this is not merely on account of the family's inclination towards exuberance. As Arrighi puts it, historians and social scientists 'mistook the Medici's indulgence in pomp and display as the main reason capital invested in their firm lagged behind profits. In fact, the Medici profits were high precisely because... they were *not* reinvested in the further expansion of the business that generated them.' (Ibid: 106-7)

Had the Medici ploughed the 663,755 gold florins spent on charity, art and taxes between 1434 and 1471 (all grouped under one category by the Medici themselves) back into circulation, they would have increased the likelihood of involving 'themselves in dubious business ventures, possibly as dubious as the one that ruined Bardi and Peruzzi' (Ibid: 107). In order to enjoy the higher returns offered by high finance during an era of intense competition by territorial states for mobile capital and decreased profits in trade and

production due to similarly high levels of competition, the Medici had to be careful not to replicate the mistakes of the Peruzzi and the Bardi, who, in financing Edward III's military endeavours, found themselves drawn into lending increasingly large sums to the King of England in order to ensure he could repay their initial loans – which, ultimately, he could not. Diverting surplus capital to artistic production acted a safety valve, one that had the important additional function of aiding their foreign branch managers in their struggle 'to be accepted as equals (or as superiors) when dealing with their aristocratic clientele' (Ibid). Furthermore, reinvesting this capital directly in high finance would have 'seriously undermined the scarcity of capital that was keeping intercapitalist competition under control, the Florentine working class in its place, and, more importantly, the Roman curia and several other European governments in constant need of the Medici's financial assistance.' (Ibid) Thus, this artistic grandeur can be seen in fact as a symptom of the financial means by which the ultimate decline of the cycle was forestalled, the tail end of which is personified by the dominance of the Medici in Florence. The distance between the crash which ruined the Peruzzi and the Bardi and the end of the Medici's reign over European high-finance is a period of some 147 years. To compare this to our times, one must remember that capitalist history accelerates and that the long centuries are getting shorter. The United States experienced its own signal crisis in the 1970s, and Arrighi predicted that some 'fifty years later', which is to say now, it would experience its 'terminal crisis'. In the face of the present crisis, as America convulses amidst riots and plague, one might get a sense of the world Botticelli's young man occupied – a world of 'systemic chaos' that reappears at the end of each cycle. (Ibid: 379)

It is in the autumnal moments of a regime of systemic accumulation, Arrighi asserts via the works of the historians Fernand Braudel and John Hicks, that the ruling classes reap the 'fruits of a bygone phase of a material expansion'. The most important aspects of this are the development of high finance and 'the conspicuous consumption of cultural products'. The rooms of the Sainsbury wing bear testament to this. The collection starts in Siena and Venice and reaches an apogee in the Florentine works, of which Botticelli's *Portrait of a Young Man* is one of the finest. In this view, the artistic glory of the Renaissance was in part 'the result of the adverse commercial conjuncture' of the latter fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, which made 'patronage of the arts a more useful or even a more profitable form of

utilization of surplus capital than its reinvestment in trade'. A 'supply-driven phenomenon', in Arrighi's wonderfully prosaic phrasing, this artistic effluence was 'associated with the invention of mythical collective identities as a means of popular mobilization in inter-city state warfare' (Ibid: 96). We can see, far from being a mere indulgence, the artistic flourishing of the renaissance was eminently practical in regard to its state-making functions, which served to create and maintain the conditions for accumulation.

It is revealing of painting's relation to the dominant organisations of capital in a given era that we have to look so hard for the traces of the next regime, the first truly systemic cycle of accumulation, presided over by a single agency, the Genoese. In Braudel's famous turn of phrase, their rule over the European world economy was 'so discreet and sophisticated that historians for a long time failed to notice it' (Braudel 1984: 156-64). Indeed, it was not the city that reigned, for it could barely defend itself, but rather the transcontinental cosmopolitan network of high-finance constituted by the Genoese capitalist diaspora and their control of the mobile Bisenzone and Piacenza money fairs, which pooled the capital of northern Italy under their direction. Arrighi points to the difference between the corporatist structure of Florentine capital and its indulgence in the arts and the 'cosmopolitan-imperial' structure of Genoese capital, which, having outsourced state-making activities to the Spanish Hapsburgs, 'never distinguished itself in this kind of conspicuous consumption' (Arrighi 2010: 139). The appearance of the Genoese school amid the terminal crisis of their regime and its flourishing only in the aftermath is suggestive of the evolving organizations of capital in the Age of the Genoese. Only when their world-encompassing and hegemonic activities are severely circumscribed by the rise of the Dutch in the north, who begin to deal the Spanish a series of setbacks on land and sea, are the Genoese forced to turn to less flexible state-making uses of their capital.

It is a painting by the Flemish artist Anthony Van Dyck that gives us our only direct look at them. In *The Balbi Children*, three young scions of the prominent *nobili vecchi* Balbi family are looking petulant and vicious as the winds of the world-system are about to displace them; their inheritance of the earth has been foreclosed and the birds are picking at their feet.[3] Sumptuously dressed, they stand amidst billowing drapes and neoclassical architecture. The *nobili vecchi* were a cosmopolitan "clique of merchant bankers" who,

whilst never quite in control of their own tumultuous city, managed to direct the affairs of the Spanish Empire towards the end of expanding their own capital through their control of Spain's finances. (Ibid: 126) It was produced around 1627: the year of the Spanish bankruptcy that marks the beginning of the Genoese terminal crisis. A year later, the Dutch privateer Piet Heyn would seize the Mexican silver-fleet and deal the final blow to the relationship of political exchange between Genoa and Madrid. The muted colours are a stark departure from the bright pageantry of the early and high renaissance. The way one of the children holds that poor bird strikes me with a sense of their aristocratic cruelty. Perhaps it is merely hindsight that renders it so but standing before it I always feel like I am standing at the end of a world: there is a sense of desolation in this gloriously wintry display of wealth.

As Braudel notes, 'any economic recession leaves a certain amount of money lying idle in the coffers of the rich: the prodigal spending of this capital, for lack of investment openings, might produce a brilliant civilization' (Braudel 1984: 899). Thus, the afterglow of the Genoese cycle of accumulation smoulders on for at least two decades on the Iberian Peninsula, even as Spanish rule deteriorates and systemic chaos, in the form of the Thirty Years War, proliferates on the European continent. In such times, mobile capital comes to find less flexible uses and to rest instead in state-making endeavours such as the production of works of art like *The Balbi Children* and the works of the Spanish Golden Age.

Velasquez's two portraits of Philip IV of Spain, painted perhaps 25 years apart in 1631-2 and 1656 respectively, are a compelling illustration of the ageing of a hegemon.[4]

Whenever I pass them, I can't help but feel a flash of contempt reading a note beside the second portrait remarking that Philip IV was said to have been unsettled by the sight of himself ageing in the two portraits.

Our narrative shines on the other side of this crisis. Here the Dutch arrive with a reply to the Genoese, who were more muted on the frontier of culture:

'Not so the Dutch, who in this sphere too showed their precociousness by leading the way in the consumption of cultural products throughout the Age of the Genoese. Just as fifteenth-century Venice and Florence had been centres of the High Renaissance, so early seventeenth-century Amsterdam became the centre of transition from the "climate of the

Renaissance," which had pervaded Europe in the previous two centuries, to the "climate of the Enlightenment," which was to pervade Europe in the next century and a half.' (Arrighi 2010: 139)

While it is not on display during the time of my wanderings, it is Gerard ter Borch who depicts the precise moment when the terminal crisis of the Genoese system of accumulation is closed for good with the signing of the Treaty of Münster (1648).[5] Part of what became known as the Peace of Westphalia, the treaty confirmed the independence of the Dutch Republic from Imperial Spain, and the end of the war that had allowed the Genoese to ascend to the 'commanding heights' of the world economy by ensuring the King of Spain could wage his wars. Borch is presumed to have been a witness to this scene, and in an old painterly joke, looks out at us from the far-left corner, steadily returning the gaze of history. The painting is the first to realistically depict a moment of history without rendering the protagonists in relation to classical myth. Known for his good-humoured paintings of Dutch interior life, I can't help but think that it displays Borch's likely sense that this event was generated in part from the everyday commercial life of Amsterdam and not from the cloistered and obscure life of the feudal lords of political accumulation, that guided him to dispense with the mask of antiquity.

Like the city-states of the Italian peninsula, the embattled but ascendant Dutch needed to create an identity for their new nation through which they could constitute a state, but there were also other reasons for their conspicuous cultural consumption. Arrighi notes that it was their control of the Baltic grain trade that was the 'underlying foundation of the city's fortunes'. If the surplus capital accrued via the Dutch domination of this trade had been reinvested, 'the most likely outcome would have been upward pressure on purchase prices, and/or a downward pressure on sales prices, which would have destroyed its profitability.' For, as Arrighi asserts, the merchant class grown rich out of the surpluses yielded by the Baltic grain trade 'knew better than to plow profits back into the expansion (of that trade) and carefully abstained from doing so'. Like the Florentines, two cycles ago, their response to this was to spend their capital on 'conspicuous cultural consumption', but also, in a further development, on "rent-bearing assets, particularly land, and in the development of commercial agriculture.' While the Italian city-states acquired the rural land 'after the end of

their mercantile expansion', the Dutch 'acquired such a space in the very process of constituting themselves into a sovereign state.' (Ibid: 138) Yet what strikes me most is the following assertion by Arrighi:

'once a rural space had been incorporated *de facto* or *de jure* within the domains of the capitalist centres, the investment of capital in agriculture came to perform a function analogous to that performed by expenditures in works of art and other durable luxuries – the function that is, of 'storing' the profits that were being made in long-distance trade and high finance but could not be reinvested in these activities without jeopardizing the profitability.' (Ibid: 184)

Each new hegemon in Arrighi's story is a geographically larger and more complex unit of organization than the last. Unlike the semi city-state of Genoa, the Dutch Republic was a fragile nation with its own agricultural space. The Dutch were quick to subject it to the capitalist logic of accumulation and give it over to commercial agriculture. The appearance of investment in land and rent-bearing assets at the same time as artistic flourishing should not surprise us; these speculative forms of investment go hand-in-hand.

This must have been on the minds of the Dutch, and it can hardly fail to be on my own, as I walk through Room 19 and see the brilliant landscapes they painted. Meindert Hobbema's *The Avenue of Middelharnis* and Philip Koninck's *An Extensive Landscape with a Road by a River* stand out.[6] What strikes me as most elegant, however, in all its implications, is Hobbema's *The Haarlem Lock, Amsterdam*, in which one can see the lock itself and, just visible in the distance, the masts of ships.[7] The painting is remarkable in the intuitive way it connects the landscape to the city and to the essential components of the Dutch mode of accumulation. It was Hobbema's only known city landscape, and this seemingly incidental view, where nothing is quite centred, is surprisingly vocal in what it says. In a moment of stillness, it offers, in a delicate visual knot, an image of the connection between the commercial entrepot functions of Amsterdam (the warehouses that lined these canals being defined by Arrighi as the 'visible weapons' of Dutch commercial supremacy), long-distance trade with the East Indies and the funneling of surplus capital into rapid urban development and, by virtue of Hobbema's stature as a painter of the rural landscapes, into the

transformation of the rural domains outside Amsterdam. (Ibid: 141)

The resurrection by the Dutch of this distinctly Florentine attitude to culture speaks to two key trends drawn out by Arrighi's analysis and tracked by the culture of the past. The first is simply the increase in the scale and complexity of capitalist organizations throughout history, but the second is an alternation from long century to long century between 'cosmopolitan-imperial' and 'corporate-national' containers of power. In response to terminal crisis, each new hegemon internalizes costs that were externalized by the previous regime. Each time this involves 'the revival of governmental and business strategies and structures that were superseded by the preceding regime' (Ibid: 224). What is at stake in each of these transformations is a reaction to a return of contradictions internal to capital that are circumvented by each regime through a spatial relocation of capital and a shift in the dominant organizational and business structures presiding over accumulation. Yet, as Marx says of these immanent barriers, each overcoming is achieved 'only by means which again place these barriers in its way on a more formidable scale [...] the *true barrier* to capitalist production is *capital itself*' (Marx 1991: 358). Terminal crises are the moment in which these contradictions can no longer be contained. What appears as long century to long century is an alternation between extensive regimes (such as the Genoese and the British) and intensive ones (such as the Florentines, the Dutch and the Americans), dominant capitalist organizational structures appear to alternate between 'cosmopolitan-imperial' and 'corporate-national' containers of power. Schematically, this reflects the alternating needs of capital to formally subsume new economic space and to increase productivity by deepening real subsumption.

One lunchtime, staring somewhat desperately at a painting by William Turner, an artist I often find offers me little more than an impenetrable blur of murkiness, I found myself looking at an image capturing the chain-link transition between the Dutch and the British cycles. The painting, depicting Dutch boats struggling in a troubled ocean, had been commissioned by the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater as a companion piece to a 17th-century Dutch seascape in his possession and finished in 1801, six years after terminal crisis and the Napoleonic Wars had swept the Dutch Republic from the map.[8] A pair of vessels collide at the crest of a wave, while two more substantial sailboats weather the tumultuous dark in the

background. Even further away, a single ship can be seen shining as beams of sunlight escape through gaps in the storm cloud and descend upon the ship. It is telling that in his effort to demonstrate his superiority as an artist that Turner gestures to the high point of the last hegemon, to the famous Dutch seascapes. John Berger once observed that Turner's distinctive feature as a landscape painter was that one did not feel themselves to be on the outside of these scenes, rather they envelop the viewer. In his words, 'it was no longer possible to believe that what he saw could ever be seen from the outside' (Berger 2015 208).

By reviving the extensive structure of Genoese-Iberian cosmopolitan-imperial capitalism, the British were able to complete the formal subsumption of the planet for capital and secure an outlet for its massive industrial production. In doing so, Britain superseded the Dutch regime which had become a victim of its slender demographic base and had become increasingly incapable of promoting the further expansion of the world economy. The governmental structure that was forged in the process of Britain's troubled ascendancy centred on the British state, the Bank of England and, perhaps most importantly, the 'Rothschildesque' network of high finance that allowed Britain to take on massive amounts of national debt in order to triumph in the Napoleonic Wars. This extroverted form of capital, ordered around free trade and external markets, is also why we have no comparative age of British painting to match the Dutch Golden Age, or the Florentine Renaissance or the period of Abstract Expressionism (itself in part a CIA funded effort at state-making on a global level at the high-point of the American century). While state-making activities remained important to the British state, as just one component in an ensemble it held less importance than it did for either the Dutch or the USA or, for that matter, the Florentines.

To look at these paintings collectively is to observe the movement of a contradiction. Regarding us with an enviable assuredness from across five centuries and in the face of the first of these transformations, we can see now why Botticelli's young man can strike us as distinctly contemporary. It was the last terminal crisis, after all, that left the National Gallery itself in ruins after the inferno of the Blitz. What Botticelli's boy speaks of with his gaze is a crisis that was never resolved and always returns. This time, the deepening of real subsumption in the US and the consolidation of national markets globally has proceeded by, to borrow from Marx, 'undermining the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the

worker' – that is to say humanity and its natural environment. (Marx 1976: 637-8) The cost of reproducing humanity and its environment has remained externalized throughout the course of the US regime and has emerged as a key barrier to further expansion of the world economy alongside massive manufacturing overcapacity. It is here that the present crisis reveals itself to be fundamentally internal to the dynamic of capital. The results of high mass consumption, adopted by the US as a response to the British regime's failure to contain mass movements and intercapitalist competition, have been catastrophic for the planet's environment and humanity as a whole, not least because of the expansion of the space in which diseases capable of causing pandemics like the current one can emerge in deforested zones and leap to urban population centres. (c.f. Vidal 2020 or Carrington 2020) This is the dialectical twist that emerges cycle to cycle: the strength of each regime is also its limit and eventual downfall.

The long centuries grow short for breath. If Arrighi's pattern were to hold, we would be about to witness the rise of a new cosmopolitan-imperial power capable of reigning over perhaps the whole planet – the likely contender appearing to be China. Yet the flowering of rustbelts in China seems to suggest something else. (c.f. Chuang 2016) At least since the onset of industrial capital, each new round of material expansion of the economy has had to reckon with the technological means by which labour was expelled in the previous cycle. Accumulation has had to proceed at a higher and higher rate from cycle to cycle to absorb the necessary capital and living labour, accelerating capitalist history in the process. China has become the centre of global manufacture, not through the creation of labour and capital absorbing activities but a transposition of manufacture from the West. (Endnotes 2010: 48) In short, the most essential ingredient of a new cycle appears to be absent – a round of material expansion of the world economy, the necessary M – C phase, upon which all rising hegemons helped to organize, promote and depended on for their power. The development of productive forces has reached such a point that even if a new round of material expansion were to occur it would be over even quicker than the rapid M - C phase of the American century. Combined with escalating ecological decay, and the ever more destructive means by which intercapitalist war can now be conducted, it is hard to imagine we shall witness another long century. The last terminal crisis provided both the opening for the most dramatic challenges to capital that we have seen and the most terrible demonstrations of its

destructive powers. It seems the only certainty is that whether China somehow rises, or the proletariat triumphs, or they fail and we all burn together, it will be *a short twenty-first century*.

Endnotes

- 1. Uccello, Paulo. *The Battle of San Romano*, 1438-40, Room 59, National Gallery, London.
- 2. Botticelli, Sandro. *Portrait of a Young Man*, 1480-85, Room 58, National Gallery, London.
- 3. Van Dyck, Anthony. *The Balbi Children*. 1625-7, Room 21, National Gallery, London.
- 4. Velasquez, Diego. *Philip IV of Spain in Brown and Silver*, 1631-2, & *Philip IV of Spain*. 1656, Room 30, National Gallery, London.
- 5. ter Borch, Gerard. *The Ratification of the Treaty of Münster*. 1648, National Gallery, London.
- 6. Hobbema, Meindert. *The Avenue of Middelharnis*, 1689. Room 19, National Gallery, London. & Koninck, Philip, *An Extensive Landscape with a Road by a River*, 1655, Room 19, National Gallery, London.
- 7. Hobbema, Meindert. *The Haarlem Lock, Amsterdam*. 1663-5, Room 19, National Gallery, London.
- 8. Turner, William. *Dutch Boats in a Gale* ('The Bridgewater Sea Piece'). 1801, Room 34, National Gallery, London.

References

Arrighi, G. (2010) *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*, Verso.

Berger, J. (2015) Portraits: On Artists, Verso.

Braudel, F. (1984) *Civilisation and Capitalism 15th-18th Century: Volume III: The Perspective of the World*, trans. S. Reynolds, Fontana Press.

Carrington, D. (2020) 'Deadly Diseases from Wildlife Thrive When Nature Is Destroyed, Study Finds', *The Guardian*, 5 Aug.,

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/05/deadly-diseases-from-wildlife-thrive-when-nature-is-destroyed-study-finds.

Chaung (2016) 'Red Dust: The Transition to Capitalism in China', *Chaung 2: Frontiers*: 21-219.

Marx, K. (1976) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I* [1867], trans. B. Fowkes, Penguin.

Marx, K. (1991) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume III* [1894], trans. D. Fernbach, Penguin.

Vidal, J. (2020) "Tip of the Iceberg": Is Our Destruction of Nature Responsible for Covid-19?", *The Guardian*, 18 March, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/18/tip-of-the-iceberg-is-our-destruction-of-nature-responsible-for-covid-19-aoe.

Enemies of Art for the Sake of its Realization: Some Comments on Crawford and Adorno

A New Institute for Social Research

1.

It's somewhat startling that such a piece of writing as Chris Crawford's "Taking Comfort in Society" could even be produced in the second decade of the twenty-first century. There is nothing at all cheap or imitative in its relentless Adornianism. Indeed there is something about Crawford's essay that feels blasted out of the present moment, directly into what has remained the hot core of the protest against reification over the past one hundred years, where nuanced engagement with Kant meets broad-brush denunciation of force-fed predigested cultural trash. Thus when one comes upon one of his penetrating characterizations of phenomena so peculiar to the present—such as "a politics of art based on censorious rage and guilt-mongering [...] taking possession of our misfortune, mystifying it and making it sacred"—it feels almost anachronistic. This can, in fact, have an explosive polemical effect: it's as if present self-humiliating stupidity were so egregious as to conjure a critical voice from beyond the grave.

However, while Crawford references the evolving relationship between art and its self-image since the commitment vs. autonomy debates, the object and the historical process tend to disappear. The term 'art' is constantly used, but we're never really sure what it means, what is being included in the discussion and what is not. A mention early on of 'serious culture' and a few stray references to galleries or museums seem to imply that it's 'fine art,' possibly of a predominantly visual nature, that's being discussed, but we're not quite sure. A broad, capacious use of the term art—which by its nature eludes being pinned down definitionally—is not in itself a problem, yet it can become somewhat of one in this context, in which a particular, historically novel malady is being diagnosed (sociologization) in relation to a general category (art), without the relation between the particular and the general having been made transparent. This leaves one trying to deduce what kind of art is being discussed based on what sorts of culture have been most 'sociologized.' Anyone

who's even vaguely aware of the identity-mongering topical-issue-bait tripe on offer at little galleries the first Friday of every month will get an intuitive idea of what Crawford seems to have his sights set primarily upon, but could we also say that film, or theater, or various genres of music, or poetry, or comics have been 'sociologized?' In fact, some yes, some no, but it seems that many of these fall outside the parameters of his analysis, without the latter having explicitly been stated.

These are not at all abstract definitional problems, but are related to a properly historical understanding of the phenomenon Crawford is critiquing. He tends to implicitly treat 'art' as a concept in a rather static and normative manner, which can be debased and abused surely, but ultimately refers back to the same object. A critique of homogeneity runs the risk of becoming a homogenous critique, a night in which all cows are shit, while 'autonomous art' drifts above it as a kind of *sollen*. This is a caricature surely, but it is a real tendency in Adorno's views on culture and art that is certainly reproduced here. Crawford is not unaware of this of course, and one of his most interesting comments turns this tendency back on itself to touch implicitly upon the socio-historical determination of art as such: "The orientation to the individual, the bourgeois subject, seems to be an irreducible aspect of art;" followed by the suggestion that "the short phase of radical bourgeois subjectivity—and with it the epistemological purview of radically autonomous art —appear [to be] a brief intermission." This is essentially correct, yet such an insight warrants further working through, disentangling, on the one hand, the historically specific character of art and of the individual, and on the other, the eclipse of 'autonomous art' along with the 'bourgeoisie' as it was traditionally understood.

2.

No pre-capitalist social formations experienced *as art-in-itself* what we would now retrospectively classify as 'art,' but only as practices and objects immediately fused with other aspects of the community and nature, with religion, with war, with sovereign power, with agricultural production and the changing of the seasons, with death and mourning. These premodern aesthetic practices, which can hardly in themselves receive the verdict of 'aesthetics', participated in a kind of *communication* we can no longer understand or

imagine, which had a direct vitality but also a blind, bounded narrowness, because it was integrated into a system of social synthesis that did not know abstract universality, *identity*, but only *great chains of being*, weighed down with tradition, caste-bound deference, and personal domination. The extent of relative 'individuation' of aesthetic producers in precapitalist periods varied of course with the specific nature of the social form, but in general, the 'author' who expressed their 'individuality' in the modern sense did not exist.

Adorno insists that individuals, "subjects [...] conscious of their individuality and singularity" are "a product of history". (Adorno 2006: 70-71) "Only he who differentiates himself from the interests and aspirations of others, he who becomes substance for himself, who establishes his self-preservation and development as a norm, is an individual. And thus the word 'individual,' as designation for the single human being, hardly occurs before the eighteenth century, and what it denotes is hardly much older than the early Renaissance" (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research 1972: 44). The individual, however, can by no means be simply counted as an achieved positivity, but is rather in large measure semblance, ideology, a delusion of self-sufficiency and self-identity, unconscious of its fundamental, constitutive imbrication in its own coercive social context, thereby unconsciously perpetuating that context. Yet Adorno's critique of capitalist society, one of the most profound and ruthless in the whole Marxist tradition, is so challenging to that tradition precisely because it is made on behalf of the unredeemed utopian promise of "that individuality [that] is not yet" (Adorno 2007: 151; emphasis added), which could only be as a product of that very society, which has rent apart "undifferentiatedness [...] the terror of the blind nexus of nature," (Adorno 2005: 246), even as it perpetuates its appearance as second nature through the social nexus of exchange against an abstract universal equivalent, which forces all nonidentity under the aspect of identity. For many drawn to party Marxism, from Lukács to Bordiga, this is the greatest Adornian heresy, for they yearn for total subsumption under an organic social whole (according to Bloch, Lukács had in his youth dreamed of joining a monastic order, but ended up with the Party instead), and for the "obliteration of the individual," seen as nothing but a disgusting interlude between two myths of immediate identity in a natural community without the slightest fissure. This latter, "the captivating spell of the old undifferentiatedness," is precisely what Adorno rightly maintained "should be obliterated" once and for all (ibid: 247).

Holding fast to the wound and the promise of the modern individual has its aesthetic consequences: where the fantasy of the substantiveness-beneath-reflection of a ballad 'round the campfire on the eve of battle was, there *Igitur* shall be.

3.

The forms of art since the sixteenth century trace along with the penetration of the commodity into social life a progressive dissolution. As a bourgeoisie began to emerge in and against societies still under the sway of the old forms of feudal, personal domination, it began to develop its own secular, individuated cultural forms no longer immediately integrated with church or aristocracy, but still stamped with a *caste-like character*. The third estate took shape, after all, as an *estate*—something qualitatively different from the pure, abstract class relation.

Marx makes a fundamental distinction between the modern class relation, a product of the abstract domination of capital, and the land-bound relations that obtained in all prior modes of production based on personal domination: "In all forms in which landed property rules supreme, the nature relationship still predominates; in the forms in which capital rules supreme, the social, historically evolved element predominates." (Marx 1986: 44) Alfred Schmidt correctly points out that Marx's dialectic can by no means "reconstruct mankind's whole history," but concerns only two decisive historical transitions, "the transition from the classical-feudal to the bourgeois epoch [...] and [...] the cataclysmic and liberating transition from the bourgeois epoch to socialism" (Schmidt 2014: 180). The former transition entailed the unprecendented rise of a dynamic, totalizing social form: in Debord's words, "the developing economy," borne by the bourgeoisie, "the only revolutionary class that ever won" (Debord 1970: §88, §87). Unlike most Marxian thinkers, Adorno recognizes that "the concept of class is bound up with the emergence of the proletariat," yet he attempts to explain Marx's dubious extension of this concept back into pre-capitalist pre-history as a polemical gesture meant to "destroy the illusion of a good-natured patriarchy" and point up "the venerable unity of a traditional structure, the natural right of hierarchy in a society that was presented as having grown organically" as actually conflictual, "a coercive organization

designed for the appropriation of the labor of others" (Adorno 2003c: 93). But this emphasis on what is the ever-same in the history of antagonistic modes of production, which has seeped right down into the misleading and anachronistic cover-concept 'class societies' that flows so freely from the pens of even otherwise heretical Marxists, has obscured what is radically new in the only *class society* that has ever existed: that human beings are reduced to "character masks, agents of exchange value" (Adorno 2007: 311; translation amended), polarized functions of a process of accumulation of abstract wealth. G.M. Tamás has thereby made an important contribution to critical theory by specifying terminologically the fundamental distinction between capitalist and precapitalist epochs, the former as characterized by *class* relations, the latter by *caste* relations. Unlike class, which is one of the "underlying, occult determinations of social life," (Tamás 2011: 43), "caste is a differential system of privileges, endowments and 'gifts' which represent a model of the social world, based on a philosophical doctrine concerning human functions and a scale of values, embodied by various closed groups whose commerce with one another is a function of their respective rungs on the ladder of human values, religiously determined" (Tamás 2006: 242).

There have been many previous antagonistic modes of production in which a non-producing caste appropriated a surplus from a producing caste. But these cannot be called 'class societies,' as the differences are ultimately more significant than the similarities. The social form of wealth in caste-structured regimes is essentially material—it is therefore non-contradictory and stable, i.e. it does not compel an expansion of production merely to preserve itself. Leisure is recognized as an element of the wealth of the non-producing higher castes, and is taken as a substantive *in itself*, as the time of the pursuit of *the good life* (what this meant in any given socio-historical context was much discussed, by Aristotle and other luminaries), not merely negatively as the absence of labor, the time of the reproduction of the capacity to labor. While surplus products may be sold as commodities, commodity-production, production *for* exchange, tends to be marginal, with the true *differentia specifica* being that labor-power is not yet bought and sold as a commodity.

Work is explicitly at the bottom of these traditional social hierarchies, in reality and definitely in their own self-conception—if there is any 'dignity of work,' it obtains only for

the caste(s) whose 'lot' it is, generally slaves, peasants or artisans, and in the latter case, such a work-pride is highly particularized, with the 'mysteries' of different trades guarded by their guilds. There is no separate sphere called 'the economy,' nor labor as alien activity that you punch in and then punch out of—those who produce do so as part of a total way of life that is their caste's lot. Production is inscribed in overt and direct forms of domination. For non-producing castes to appropriate some of the product, they have to directly enslave the producers, or send their armed retainers to rob them of a portion of their harvest (the corvée). These traditional, openly-acknowledged and apparently nature-grown hierarchies constitute the dominant form of social synthesis. The various tasks by which humans transform nature and produce their means of subsistence are not the nexus but the mere necessary appendage of this caste system, one that cannot be thought in itself as 'labor' *per se*. Perhaps we can say that caste societies have modes of production, but they *are* not modes of production in the way that capital is (similarly, even the word *society* is anachronistic here, as a concept of the third estate that will only come into its own with global capitalism, but it will have to do to avoid undue linguistic awkwardness).

An important aspect of caste societies [sic] is the complete externality of the different castes vis-à-vis one another. They have different rights, privileges, morals, ethics, functions and even ontological statuses, seen as god-given, immutable and heritable. What is a virtue for one caste is a vice for another. The 'universally human' is basically not really even thinkable; humanity is a highly restricted condition (some would say this is still true, which is fair enough, but the difference is that in caste societies this can't even be conceived as 'injustice': it is merely fact). What we call 'social mobility' is nearly impossible in caste societies, both practically and conceptually: you can't alter your 'birth.' Caste also in most cases trumped the kind of pre-'national' pre-'racial' communitarianism of the *ethnie*, hence the fact that the crowned heads of Europe intermarried to secure feudal allegiance, and it was not really seen as a problem that an Austrian might be ruling Spain: they were of royal blood, and that came first.

It would not be unreasonable to claim that the social forms of *all* precapitalist antagonistic modes of production were caste societies of one variety or another, with important differences among them of course. Heide Gerstenberger has shown that in Europe, the

rationalized structures of personal domination known as the estates of the *ancien régime* were the specific historical precondition of the generalization of capitalist production relations and the impersonal domination of the state, the 'rule of law' (Gerstenberger 2007), i.e. the unity-in-separation of the 'political' and 'economic,' which had previously been immediately fused to the extent that they didn't exist *as such*, and their retrospective analytic separation *for us* is anachronistic.

Class is a highly abstract economic concept, and no precapitalist social form had been economic in nature. The class-relation, or the capital-labor relation, names the contradictory relation of productive activity qua labor to itself when its subjective and objective moments are separated, when living labor as bare subjectivity is dominated by dead labor, capital, as alien objectivity, so that capital appears as subject (or, better, as the subject-like selfexpansion of value) and labor (and all the more so the laborers who are its 'bearers') appears as object. The class-relation is an internal self-relation: labor is subsumed under capital as one of its moments. Richard Gunn's "Notes on Class" is riddled with flaws, but there's important truth content in it: that we ought not take 'class' as a sociological surfacecategory, an empirical grouping of people into various strata based on various criteria (Gunn 1987). Strictly speaking, there can be no pure 'class belonging.' 'Classes' have no positive existence in themselves and cannot be registered by the sociological understanding as immediate data. The capital-labor relation is a contradictory dynamic that appears in everchanging phenomenal forms on the surface of society and structures the lives of determinate individuals. Traditional Marxists, based on a consideration of English economic conditions and French politics, hypostatized certain aspects of how these forms presented themselves in the mid-nineteenth century as the 'class contradiction' between bourgeoisie and proletariat.

4.

Contained in the concept of the class-relation are the open antagonisms of interest obtaining *within* it, across all the heterogeneous lives structured by it, from one pole to the other, not simply the hidden antagonistic relation of exploitation *between* the poles, which plays out largely behind the backs of individuals, while leaving its scars: the only real unity of the proletariat or capital respectively is in their respective internal separations, the

complementary processes of *competition* and the multiplication of negative identifications through which the capitalist totality is reproduced. Caste-like political compositions conceal this nonidentity by forcing it under the aspect of identity with a positive image of 'the class,' or some substitute for it.

But this is not merely the result of the canny manipulation of class affirmation-obsessed leaders cooking up 'hegemonic figures,' but once had a relatively organic basis in the historical situation of the struggles: a world of estates beats the class-relation into estate-like shapes, but a whole world constituted through the exchange abstraction silently identifies its poles, and they appear as bearers of so many 'identities.' Those who still insist on talking about class must talk about it like it's an 'identity' too. But it is merely a negative dynamic which structures in relation to itself other negative dynamics (the hierarchical racializing constitution of abstract legal personhood, the dimorphic sexualizing scission of reproductive labor). The totalizing social form of capital is now their axis, and it is through its reproduction that these dynamics throw off reified images apparently identical with themselves.

Both 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat,' as they were traditionally understood, were caste-like forms of appearance of the class-relation, with their own distinctive cultures, styles, institutions, etc., because they were struggling against, and in the context of, a caste society. The great revolutionary upheavals of the modern period, whether the revolutionary forces had a predominantly bourgeois or proletarian composition, had been revolts of *the third estate* (in a broad sense) against the various 'unproductive' ruling estates or castes of premodern agrarian modes of production (and the historical and geographic peculiarities of these different caste systems and the struggles against them have determined the character of the capitalist state forms which subsequently emerged: versions of bourgeois-liberal, bureaucratic-stalinist, postcolonial-developmentalist or something else entirely—see Japan, for example, in which capital accumulation was overseen by the old-regime elites themselves).

The class-relation, the dynamic of *economy* immanent to the third estate, appeared in political and cultural shapes determined by the contest of exploiter and exploited to be the

authentic representative of this estate as a whole in its struggle against the fixed and frozen castes (landholders, peasantry, clergy, military, sovereigns and their retainers), hence the remarkable confluence of rhetoric, values, aims and methods of the bourgeois emancipation movements and the old workers' movement (which, in the salad days of pre-WWI social democracy, did its damnedest to dress itself up as the rightful heir to the title of third estate). The claim is one of productivity against parasitism, equality against privilege, novelty against tradition, enlightenment against superstition, a morally superior 'people' against a decadent clique, and it gave the contours to high bourgeois culture. This bourgeoisie was janus-faced: a caste, a particular, *kulturell bürgerliche* status group of propertied, urban commoners, when facing the other castes of the old regime; the class of capital, a general, anonymous economic function, when facing the proletarian enemy within. The first face proved inessential and historically transient, and persisted only so long as did the remnants of the old regime.

5.

It was the bourgeoisie, this caste-in-and-against-castes, beginning to accumulate its capital in 10-man workshops, fashioning itself in the negative image of the feudal father it was busy killing, that defined art-as-such, art as a separate, autonomous sphere, as individual expression, as "purposeless purposiveness," while the newly dispossessed proletarians were still "halfway outside society" (Adorno 2003b: 115).

Art (and to be clear, the term here includes literature, theatre and music) was a modern phenomenon, intrinsically bound to the period of the contradictory emergence of the bourgeoisie as a culturally-delimited caste and at the same time as a moment in a mode of production that would dissolve, or perhaps subsume, all castes—as art becomes disentangled from its organic integration into the feudal order, it becomes a specialized sphere to be exalted in itself precisely because it is at once threatened with becoming *not* that, becoming *commercialized*. Art is from the start a contradictory response to the forces that bring it into being, a kind of nature-preserve in which to seclude everything that can now be recognized as 'personal,' 'qualitative,' 'expressive,' 'magical,' everything that the bourgeoisie wants to *spare* from the quantifying, reifying, disintegrating effects of its own

commodity economy, but only stand out by *contrast* to this economy; thus the embattled aristocracy cling to it as the banner of chivalrous enthusiasm, of ancient venerable prejudices, and it becomes a battleground in the struggle of the bourgeois against the *ancien régime*. This struggle is the ferment of the great art from the days when Chaucer caused a scandal by signing his works through Chopin's national-liberationist polonaises, which lent it a content-rich, this-worldly character the loss of which would later be bemoaned. Shelley's comment that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world, which today sounds simply preposterous, expressed a longing for a period in his day nearly passed, which would die definitively with Hugo. In the early-modern era, the artist himself may have often been little more than a house servant, but he spoke his master's voice: that of the newborn individual, not yet conscious of its own impotence in the face of the objective social process to which it nonetheless owed its semblance of subjectivity.

But the old bourgeoisie-qua-caste, whose spirit Max Weber attempted to grasp and whose alleged abstemious, mercantile philistinism (so easy to *épater*) provided both *bête-noire* and condition of possibility for modern art, was itself a brief appearance, soon devoured by the mode of production it had midwifed. This process of the bourgeoisie-qua-caste becoming obsolescent began in the most advanced capitalist countries already in the nineteenth century, while most of the world was still sunk in feudal land-bound relations—it was the ground of the contradictory pathos of the great moderns from Baudelaire to Proust. That the latter titled his debut *Pleasures and Days*, a cheeky détournement of Hesiod bathed in pastel-pale Sunday-afternoon light, is emblematic of the uselessness of his class: only with its historic work at an end (and so too the muscular culture which greased the wheels), can it finally, truly posit art as art, which is intrinsically linked to social purposelessness. This is why philistines hate its mannered impenetrability with precisely the same resentful rage reserved for those who haven't earned their living by the sweat of their brow, and won't talk with the brutal simplicity of instrumental reason, the self-preserving wiles required to get one over on the world. Even the image of the aesthete lounging on the Majorelle divan, perusing the space between the word *fleur* and every known blossom, although perched on the broken backs of proletarians, has a presentiment of utopia in it: poésie pure is as clear as the sky we will gaze at, floating on water, when labor is no longer the center of everything, and no one goes hungry anymore.

The middling-bourgeois, no longer the Faustian hero of 1789, but helpless before the concentration and centralization of the automatic monster he had thought was *his*, his social function increasingly handed over to white-collar workers: it was capital accumulation itself that "expropriated the expropriators," largely divesting itself of private proprietors who endeavor to 'direct' or 'manage' their means of production, liquidating an empirical group that could take the socio-cultural-cum-political form of 'the bourgeoisie'—and for those who care, this is entirely consistent with Marx's passive-voice formulation, not to mention Engels's startlingly accurate prediction of a motley lot of functionless beneficiaries of dividends with nothing to do but despoil each other on the stock market, and consume culture. Not by coincidence do money-as-money and art-as-art belong together. This is the ambit of the 'autonomous art' Adorno loved, highly individuated, opaque, useless and besieged by alien forces.

All the while, the world was not half as capitalist as anyone thought; bourgeois revolutions (increasingly under the banners of 'socialism') were still being fought; the feudal husks hung around, especially in the cultural sphere. Little captures this period better than Ernst Bloch's "multi-level dialectics" of "non-contemporaneous contradiction." (Bloch 1991: 113) At the prow of this rapidly accelerating era of shocks, art's task is for some (the Matthew Arnold types) to guard what's left of ossified tradition; for others, it is to "produce new experience" (as Crawford puts it). The emergence of proletarian revolutionary contestation, and ideas of a socialist or communist beyond, led to the hypothesis that modern art could explicitly or implicitly aid this cause, if not as committed propaganda, then as the bourgeoisie's self-cannibalistic autocritique, as a kind of fifth column behind enemy lines, as Benjamin characterized the art of Baudelaire (Benjamin 1997: 104). All this rests on an identification of art with the bourgeoisie, the notion of 'bourgeois culture,' which may have had a good deal of truth to it for a certain period, but not only should it be nuanced by a detailed study of the social composition of the producers and consumers of modern art from 1830-1930, it also reaches an historical limit immanent to the secular developmental tendency of the capitalist mode of production itself.

If memory serves, Adorno says somewhere that there can be no 'proletarian culture,' only this radically self-wounding modern bourgeois culture, reprising an argument made perhaps most notably by Rosa Luxemburg: "In the history of earlier class struggles, aspiring classes (like the Third Estate in recent days) could anticipate political dominion by establishing an intellectual dominance, inasmuch as, while they were still subjugated classes, they could set up a new science and a new art against obsolete culture of the decadent period. The proletariat is in a very different position. As a nonpossessing class, it cannot in the course of its struggle upwards spontaneously create a mental culture of its own while it remains in the framework of bourgeois society. Within that society, and so long as its economic foundations persist, there can be no other culture than a bourgeois culture" (Luxemburg 1970: 110).

It's easy to see that this conception falls prey to the traditional confusion of caste and class—it's certainly true that the proletariat will not come to political or cultural dominance in the manner of the third estate; but the proletariat, politics and culture itself will only persist so long as the economic foundations of capitalist society do, so anything resembling a proletarian culture could only exist on those foundations. As we have seen, autonomous art is bound up not with the so-called ascendance of a class but its obsolescence—and it is not only the bourgeoisie, but also the proletariat that has become superfluous while still within the framework of capitalism: the tendential superfluity of its basis, abstract labor-time in production, being the moving contradiction at the very heart capital accumulation, the self-undermining self-valorization of value.

Adorno comprehends more of this than both his superficial detractors and superficial supporters realize. Better than most Marxists of his period, he was able to separate the essence of the class-relation as an objective dynamic from the caste-like appearances of 'class consciousness:' "screened from subjectivity, the difference between the classes grows objectively with the increasing concentration of capital. This plays a decisive part in the existence of individuals; if it were not so, the notion of class would merely be fetishization" (Adorno 1969: 150). In the post-WWII era, when so many, not least among them his Frankfurt colleagues, imagined they inhabited a one-dimensional capitalism that had sealed

its cracks and locked down its contradictions politically, Adorno was almost alone (alongside Paul Mattick) in insisting upon understanding capital as a negative totality, moved by the "law of value, the law of accumulation, the law of the collapse" (Adorno 2003b: 112) in its very essence, that "create[s] a dynamic which turns against [itself]; more and more labour is set free, thereby creating the conditions of crisis and the continuously increasing threat to the system itself. In order to maintain itself, the system must produce precisely such moments through which it increasingly undermines [untergräbt] its own possibility." (ibid 2018: 8) "The progress of technology makes labor objectively superfluous to a large extent, that is, the superfluity is more one of laborers than of labor [...] in this society, we all potentially experience ourselves as superfluous in terms of our work, that we live our lives only by the grace of society" (ibid 2019: 59). He recognizes that so-called social integration or levelling is largely semblance, an ideological epiphenomenon: "society remains class struggle" (ibid 1969: 149), "produces and reproduces classes, though not necessarily in the same way they are represented in Zola's Germinal" – that is, not with the appearance of castes, but as "functions of their own apparatus of production" (ibid 2003b: 116).

By the time the class-riven third estate as a whole had destroyed its hostile context of estates, and was able at mid-twentieth century to appear as *the whole of society*, the class relation could no longer appear politically constituted as 'two great camps' within it. The dominant appearance was of a class society without classes, or rather, without castes: in Adorno's words, "a parody of classless society" (ibid 2019: 70). In the era of the casteless class society, efforts to politically recompose 'the proletariat' or 'the working class' in estate-like shapes have had something comic about them, and always required personifying the opposite pole of the class-relation in pseudo-concretion as a conspiratorial, parasitic billionaire caste of fat cats (or Jews) which could be hated, fought, pleaded with or replaced with the just representatives of the deserving. Against this "confus[ion of] paper doll leaders with the objective movement of history," Adorno rightly denounces "the veil of personalization [...] the idea that human beings are in control and decide, not an anonymous machinery, and that there is still life at the commanding heights of society" (ibid 1974: 79).

Yet do Adorno's views on art and cultural matters entirely keep pace with his critique of

political economy? There is a tension in his thinking between the appearance-bound caste-like notion of 'bourgeois culture,' which is alone supposed to be able to maintain a semblance of autonomy, and concepts such as the culture industry which register the flattening of superficial cultural distinctions between the 'pseudo-castes' that had obtained in an earlier era of capital accumulation. Bourgeois art's autonomy, indeed its very existence, was a morbid symptom of a world no longer fully feudal and not yet fully capitalist, so as the objective movement of history grinds on at unspeakable human cost, as Adorno rightly insisted it did against those who thought history had ended with the 'affluent society,' what became of art?

7.

The art of the 'art world' (of galleries and critics and serious culture) as the perpetual pursuit of new experience hit a wall about the same time the profit rate hit a wall – in the late 1960s, when Adorno correctly saw that "the writing on the wall suggests a slow inflationary collapse" (ibid 1977: 37). The only thing left for it was to become, as Crawford has shown, a guilty sociological reflex. But who is this 'art world?' This is the period, especially in European social-democratic countries, at which it becomes possible for more and more proletarians to get 'higher' educations, to go to art school on the welfare state's dime, to acquire some exposure to 'culture' without necessarily any prospects of joining the cognoscenti of New York art-opening wine-sniffers. At the same time Bourdieu is formulating his theory of culture as gate-keeping status-marker, the solidity of this kind of boundary is being objectively undermined. In a way, in the 1970s, art (particularly 'high art' of the visual type that is un-reproducible and thus subject to the dynamic of monopoly rent) becomes, on the one side, an asset for financial speculation no different from real estate, entirely removed from anyone but the super-rich (which it proceeds to guiltily reflect upon), and on the other, something kids on the dole do for kicks. Massive amounts of small capitalists are expropriated, the class relation polarizes objectively as the cultural coordinates of pseudo-caste are blasted to pieces. A large middle-bourgeoisie distinguished by 'taste' as the 'public' for 'serious culture' dissolves into laid-back hip billionaires à la Richard Branson, and a proletarian avant-garde à la Throbbing Gristle, with a vast indeterminate sea in between; the 'art world' becomes an appendage of high finance as it

loses its monopoly on the aesthetic, and the commitment vs. autonomy debates are revived in the squats.

It is certainly dubious to speak of 'proletarian culture' in any positive sense, but not simply because everything that's not Beckett is culture industry trash, but for the same reason it was dubious to speak of autonomous art. Art-as-art was a moment of the dissolution of the feudal order, of the emergence-becoming-obsolescence of the bourgeoisie as a caste-cumclass. And culture more broadly "originates in the radical separation of mental and physical labor. [...] no authentic work of art and no true philosophy, according to their very meaning, has ever exhausted itself in itself alone, in its being-in-itself. They have always stood in relation to the actual life-process of society from which they distinguished themselves." Culture is what forgets that it "ekes out its existence only by virtue of exploitation already perpetrated in the sphere of production," spirit blind to its social genesis (ibid 2003a: 150). Adorno of course knows that it's dubious to speak of autonomous art, that art's autonomy from the social life-process is socially-necessary semblance, and as far as it goes, he is right to side with art that radically doubles down on that semblance, accentuating the gap between its pretended freedom and the real unfreedom of society, thereby denouncing the latter, "the subjugation of men to the prevailing form in which their lives are reproduced," (ibid) as against the pious social-workers of 'committed art.' And Crawford is to be commended for demonstrating that what is worst in the latter has been grossly exacerbated in today's sociologized art. Art which dredges itself for alleged social positions to be sanctimoniously censured or sanctioned is noxious because it is, simply put, philistinism. Art is already false due to its sequestration from life, but to hastily revoke its licence in the name of a shortsighted and superficial redistributive politics (typically redistributing only symbolic tokens) merely falsifies it a second time, cancelling its partial truth – this sad procedure could appeal only to those for whom freedom is identical with themselves getting to play police. The fact that "all culture shares the guilt of society" (ibid) is precisely what makes its degenerating into an exercise in finger-pointing and self-censorship grotesque and preposterous. The artist—or cultural critic, if there's even a difference anymore—that never stops harping on the particular culpability of this-or-that 'problematic' bit of culture never stops expecting that it should've already been different, thereby mocking the obviousness of universal suffering; never stops expecting conformity with some transcendent standard of

slave-moralistic rectitude they've cooked up in their own heads, thereby demonstrating their fundamental incapacity to even attempt to think out of the context of delusion in which they've been sealed. The one that quibbles with every detail has bought the biggest lie of all, obstinately insisting on rehearsing shock at anything which lets slip that this might not in fact be the best of all possible worlds, over and over again.

But one must be very careful with the concept of autonomous art; it's a lesser evil in a radically false world, and its truth content is falsified if it is taken to be true in itself. Art should not be confused with the light of utopia that once fell on it: it too must go if and when "the fatal fragmentation of society might some day end" with "the abolition of the divorce between mental and physical work" (ibid). Adorno says this, but one suspects that he doesn't quite believe it himself. This is perhaps understandable, as that end seemed, and seems, hardly in sight. Something similar could be said about the concept of *proletarian* autonomy. For the proletariat—a pole of the capital-relation—to become 'autonomous' as proletariat is both incoherent and undesirable. While it is certainly true that trade union apparatuses have been for over a century an obstacle to the effective prosecution of systemimmanent wage and conditions struggles, and workers must often fight without and against them, hypostatizing this situation as the demand for a politically-constituted class autonomy within this society has something inhuman about it, as it inevitably drags along an ideology that poses dehumanization, misery and the meager means of coping with them as somehow more pure and noble than the easy living of the lazybones bossman. It also tends to obscure the fact that such struggles are less and less effective no matter how combative the workers, and are less and less possible even to undertake as profitable accumulation has ground to a crawl, and the class-relation is spinning apart: surplus capital blows its own bubbles at one end and the devalorized surplus proletariat is lucky to be exploited (or more often, to find some unproductive wage slavery funded out of the total social capital) at the other.

All that said, the self-activity of proletarians, however malformed by this society, has the potential to at times point beyond their existence *as proletarians*, and all the more so as the dynamic of capital accumulation increasingly tosses workers out of work, out of their 'positive' role as value-productive workers. This is not an argument for some sort of authentic humanity subsisting beneath a reified shell, but rather that the contradictory

dynamic of capital accumulation itself has the potential to *force proletarians to become humans*.

8.

The moment of the avant-garde attempt to overcome the separation between art and life characteristic of the capitalist era is passed over by Crawford in a sentence or two, and is reduced to the "tension between art's autonomy and its political efficacy." This tends to trivialize the avant-gardists' own motives, and the questions thrown up by their attempt are far from settled or invalidated. As a corrective to Adorno's perhaps overzealous fear of the social contamination of art's autonomy, it would be salutary to recall the tension as Guy Debord saw it, between art as a specialized 'sphere' and art as a quality of experience in time, between the contemplative stance and all-sided activity, and to take seriously André Breton's claim that in the communist future, "the climate of Benjamin Péret's poetry or Max Ernst's painting will then be the very climate of life." (Breton 1969: 233) The victory of art and the victory of the proletariat mean the disappearance of both and the positing of humanity.

Of course, when this prospect seems veritably impossible, the Adornian impulse to resist the *false integration of art and life* is as understandable as the autonomist impulse to resist the integration of the proletariat at the level of representation. But this desire is a bit like the desire to protect the petty commodity producer and his handicrafts from the expropriating onslaught of capital – this is too much like what Tamás calls a 'Rousseauist' picture of capitalism: "For Marx, it is history; for Rous¬seau, it is evil. [...] For Marx, the road to the end of capitalism (and beyond) leads through the completion of capitalism, a system of economic and intellectual growth, imagination, waste, anarchy, destruction, destitution. It is an *apocalypse* in the original Greek sense of the word, a 'falling away of the veils' which reveals all the social mechanisms in their stark nakedness; capitalism helps us to *know* because it is unable to sustain illusions, especially naturalistic and religious illusions. It liberated subjects from their traditional rootedness (which was presented to them by the *ancient régime* as 'natural') to hurl them onto the labour market where their productive-creative essence reveals itself to be disposable, replaceable, dependent on demand—in other

words, wholly alien to self-perception or 'inner worth'. In capitalism, what human beings are, is contingent or stochastic; there is no way in which they *are as such, in themselves*. Their identity is limited by the permanent re-evaluation of the market and by the transient historicity of everything, determined by—among other contingent factors—random developments in science and technology. What makes the whole thing demonic indeed is that in contradistinction to the external character, the incomprehensibility, of 'fate', 'the stars', participants in the capitalist economy are not born to that condition, they are placed in their respective positions by a series of choices and compulsions that are obviously manmade. To be born noble and ignoble is nobody's fault, has no moral dimensions; but alienation appears self-inflicted. Marx is the poet of that Faustian demonism: only capitalism reveals the social, and the final unmasking; the final *apocalypse*, the final revelation can be reached by wading through the murk of estrangement which, seen historically, is unique in its energy, in its diabolical force." (Tamás 2006: 230)

Adorno rightly pointed out that "Marx and Engels were enemies of Utopia for the sake of its realization." (Adorno 2007: 322) But does he not at times fall short of this diabolically dialectical stance, seeking to fix the 'utopian dimension' in the place in which he saw it flash up: in modern, autonomous art? Crawford is dead right that "sociologized art lost this utopian dimension by taking bourgeois society as its only horizon." The picture he puts in the mouth of the 'everyday consciousness' of "an art world in which judgment is inseparable from marketing, oscillating between a guilt-ridden desire to 'do some good in the world' and a reactionary cynical acceptance of its reduction to commerce in a dubiously overvalued luxury market" seems essentially accurate. Adorno once said that the "genius of Marx" was to have "tackled exactly that which he found disgusting: the economy" (ibid 2018: 11). One gets the sense that this is what Crawford has done with the contemporary art world, but it seems a rather morbid interest—a case study in something that has become incapable of pointing beyond itself, in other words, an autopsy.

But this is not merely the judgment of some commonsensical philistine "hostility to art that is at heart identical to hostility to theory" (ibid 1977: 46), but of enemies of art for the sake of its realization. Aesthetic experience must be taken with the utmost seriousness, even and especially by those who have no interest in the kind of art-world art that has become

pathetic sub-political journalism for the simple reason so well-detailed by Crawford: aesthetic experience has vanished from it. Where else can it flash up? That question requires enquiring into what it is. Crawford touches on this in terms of *time*: "Relations based on the preponderance of abstractions over human life, mediated by value as the hegemony of abstract time, are replaced with a form of self-relation wherein the work's elements stand as an objectivated complex not determined from without. The experience of the transformed time sedimented in art, obvious in all its major forms, is the establishment within art of time as the determinate negation of abstract time and, by extension, society mediated by labor."

This passage is perhaps not a bad treatment of art-as-art, which can only appear in capitalist society. But it is problematic for any sense of what it is in aesthetic experience that points beyond this art-as-art, for it presupposes art as a delimited object rather than a process into which the object enters as a moment. The subject as artist disappears, and as observer of the work appears only implicitly. The idea that time is "sedimented in" art, we hypothesize, belongs to a metaphysics that is only comprehensible in the world based on abstract labor, which is 'congealed' in commodities. Art-as-such-as-object may have a kind of 'valueladen' (in the axiological sense) 'now-time' sedimented in it as opposed to the abstract labor-time sedimented in the commodity, but this leaves the problem of the 'sedimenting' untouched. The greatness and the limit of autonomous art in the era of high capitalism was that it demanded that its observer make its petrified relations dance by singing their own tune to them. But it can then be at best the spirit of spiritless conditions in which the past continues to dominate the present. We can measure the extent of spirit's loss by the fact that even at the highest peaks of the now-long-dead 'bourgeois culture,' it was satisfied with the sedimented life of art. To point this out does not amount to the solipsistic actionist's industrious urge to "dynamize everything existent into pure actuality," but only a reiteration of Adorno's emphasis on "truth," including aesthetic truth, as "the constellation of subject and object in which both penetrate each other," (ibid 2007: 127), "[t]ruth as process" (ibid 1993: 40).

Autonomy, with its Kantian stink, is a dubious, even treacherous, concept – it has the merit of suggesting self-determination, but it does so in a way that seems to presuppose 'heteronomous' external constraint as its other that it must perpetually rebuff. It comes too

close to suggesting a kind of narrow 'freedom from,' a monadic autarky that makes no sense when we think of the "all-sided" "social individual" Marx anticipated, "the universality of the individual's needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive forces, etc.," (Marx 1986: 411) much less Adorno's vision of 'freedom towards the object'. The dichotomy of autonomy and heteronomy spatializes the idea of freedom, entailing a spurious 'inside' and 'outside,' as we see in Crawford's statement that the autonomous artwork is "not determined from without." Does it pull itself into existence by its own hair like Munchausen? As Adorno points out, "the separation of outer and inner is generally naïve, pre-critical. Even though the distinction should be retained, since it presents itself in primary experience (i.e. to the actually alienated), it should not be made absolute" (Adorno 2006: 187). The distinction, false yet real in the false society, ought to be taken with the proverbial grain of dialectical salt. It is certainly preferable for the artwork to appear, or aspire to be, as little determined 'from without' by the dequalifying instrumentality of the universal exchange-process as possible, but this is to lower the bar tremendously, in fact so far that it cannot see beyond the "horizon" of "bourgeois society." In fact, autonomous art scarcely ever could, just as 'proletarian autonomy' couldn't either, because beyond the horizon was its own negation: its limit was its own existence, nailing the artwork no less than the class to the cross of the present. To accept its limit is to accept a reduction of aesthetic experience to a Crusoe-like island, "as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living together and talking to each other." Autonomous art was "a documentation of the conditions of noncommunication" (Debord 2003: 37), and thus its power was to demoralize the efforts to recompose noncommunication into the apologetic glossy surface of pseudocommunication, of unity-in-separation. It laid separation bare, held the wound open and let it bleed. But this is all over now. When everything is pain, nothing hurts. Henri Lefebvre thought it wouldn't come to pass, but it has: in the so-called cultural sphere "the absence of communication and communication pushed to the point of paroxysm" have met and their identities have merged "in a monotonous and Babel-like confusion," "a gigantic tautology" (Lefebvre 2002: 77). The "new and unforeseen" that Lefebvre thought would forestall this "great pleonasm" because at the very least it would elicit "sheer horror" merely elicits *lols*.

But art, no less than abstract labor, no less than man, is time. And the dynamic of capital accumulation in its terminal phase makes proletarians' time increasingly superfluous. As

Robert Kurz put it: "The result is not, as was expected, more free time for everyone, but a yet greater acceleration within capitalist space-time for some, and massive structural unemployment for others. Unemployment in capitalism, however, is not free time, but a time of scarcity. Those who are excluded from empty acceleration do not gain an increase in leisure, but are defined rather as practical non-humans" (Kurz 2011). But we know that whatever is today defined as 'human'—the productive worker, her time enclosed, evacuated, vivisected, sold off, sedimented and disposed of—is the furthest from all humanity, is only a ritual of capital. Thus the exclusion from this non-life, while it immediately means only a shade-like existence of insecurity, humiliation and helplessness, also means, *in potentia*, for the class-transcending consciousness, a time that needn't be congealed. The vague outlines of aesthetic experience may be sought in the time of un- and underemployed proletarians, for those who must fight where they are.

The old culture of the bourgeoisie-qua-pseudo-caste, radical and autonomous or otherwise, was among the first casualties of the chameleon-like flatness of the global real domination of capital, the most culturally egalitarian force in history, in the worst sense. But Adorno was blind to the bits and shards of a modern proletarian 'culture' (if we should still use this unfortunate word) which began to emerge as the proletariat-qua-pseudo-caste glorified by the old workers' movement began to dissolve, precisely to the extent to which surplus proletarians began to take themselves as something beyond their proletarianization. It was weak, deluded, inadequate (though perhaps no more so than the autonomous or avant-garde art of the obsolete bourgeoisie), and fodder for "the vampire-like hunger of the culture industry" (Kurz 2010) which has already largely swallowed it almost entirely. This proletarian culture is not the spontaneous eruption of the residuum of undomesticated humanity, but an acrid seepage from the walking corpse of *homo economicus*. It tastes like *passing time*. The demand to *live our time* is still the most radical content of the communist movement, just as it is the anticipation of aesthetic experience freed from the work and returned to life *at a higher level*.

References

Adorno, Theodor W. (1969) 'Society', in: Salmagundi, 10/11 (Fall-Winter): 144-53.

Adorno, Theodor W. (1974) 'Commitment', trans. by Francis McDonagh, in *New Left Review*, Issue 87-88 (Sept-Dec.): 75-89.

Adorno, Theodor W. (1977) *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby, London: Heinemann Education Books.

Adorno, Theodor W. (1993) *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. S. W. Nicholsen, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Adorno, Theodor W. (2003a) 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in: *Can One Live after Auschwitz?*: *A Philosophical Reader*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press: 146-162.

Adorno, Theodor W. (2003b) 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?', in: *Can One Live after Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press: 111-125.

Adorno, Theodor W. (2003c) 'Reflections on Class Theory', in: *Can One Live after Auschwitz?*: *A Philosophical Reader*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press: 93-110.

Adorno, Theodor W. (2005) 'On Subject and Object', in: *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford, New York: Columbia University Press: 245-258.

Adorno, Theodor W. (2006) *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Adorno, Theodor W. (2007) Negative Dialectics, trans. E.B. Ashton, New York: Continuum.

Adorno, Theodor W. (2018) 'Theodor W. Adorno on Marx and the Basic Concepts of Sociological Theory', trans. Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson and Chris O'Kane, in: *Historical*

Materialism, Vol. 26 (1): 1-11.

Adorno, Theodor W. (2019) *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society*, trans. Wieland Hoban, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Benjamin, Walter (1997) 'Addendum to The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', in: *Charles Baudelaire*, trans. Harry Zohn, London: Verso.

Bloch, Ernst (1991) *The Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Breton, André (1969) 'Political Position of Today's Art', in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. R. Seaver and H.R. Lane, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press: 212-233.

Debord, Guy (1970) *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman and Jon Supak, Detroit: Black & Red.

Debord, Guy (2003) 'Critique of Separation', in: *Complete Cinematic Works: Scripts, Still and Document*, trans. and ed. Ken Knabb, Edinburgh: AK Press: 29-42.

Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (1972) *Aspects of Sociology*, trans. John Viertel, Boston: Beacon Press.

Gerstenberger, Heide (2007) *Impersonal Power*, trans. David Fernbach, Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Gunn, Richard (1987) 'Notes on Class', in: Common Sense, Vol. 2.

Kurz, Robert (2010) 'The Culture Industry in the 21st Century', *Libcom*, https://libcom.org/library/culture-industry-21st-century-robert-kurz.

Kurz, Robert (2011) 'The Expropriation of Time', *Libcom*,

https://libcom.org/history/expropriation-time-robert-kurz>.

Lefebvre, Henri (2002) *Critique of Everyday Life Volume 2: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, trans. John Moore, London: Verso.

Luxemburg, Rosa (1970) 'Stagnation and Progress of Marxism', in: *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, ed. Mary-Alice Waters, New York: Pathfinder Press: 106-111.

Marx, Karl (1986) 'Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58', in: *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 28, London: Progress Publishers.

Schmidt, Alfred (2014) The Concept of Nature in Marx, trans. Ben Fowkes, London: Verso.

Tamás, G.M. (2006) 'Telling the Truth About Class', in: *Socialist Register*, Vol. 42: 228-268.

Tamás, G.M. (2011) 'Marx on 1989', in: *First the Transition Then the Crash: Eastern Europe in the 2000s*, ed. Gareth Dale, London: Pluto Press: 21-45.

Narcissism as Norm: Psychic Deformation in Late Capitalist Society

Peter Samol

Originally published in Samol, Peter (2019) "Narzissmus als Norm. Psychische Deformation in der spätkapitalistischen Gesellschaft." In: *Widerspruch. Beiträge zu sozialistischer Politik*, Nr. 73/2019 (Zürich): 71-8. German original available at http://www.krisis.org/2019/narzissmus-als-norm/.

Translation by Eric-John Russell

Every society reproduces the presuppositions of its existence in the people that belong to it, those who, in their turn, reproduce the structure of the society in which they live through their activity. If society turns into a crisis, it is also reflected in the condition of individuals. Fewer and fewer people work in so-called normal working conditions. At the same time, the portion of the population living in relative poverty, or at risk of poverty, is rising. Depending on the survey, the number of precarious employees—here, as an example, we refer to the values for the export nation of Germany—is between 25 and 40 per cent; nine of out ten people are afraid of social decline and poverty (Schindler 2016: 23). This threat and the fear of it have led to a specific form of reaction which endangers social cohesion. In this form of reaction resides a narcissism which, as an attitude, is heavily demanded and promoted in the social formation of late capitalism.

Increasing separation of bourgeois individuals

The neoliberal credo, which defines the guidelines in politics and economy, is that 'a good society is a society of strong individuals.' (Bude 2019: 32) These individuals are constantly told that to compete for jobs, places in education and in general for success and reputation. In so doing, they must show willingness to change, high personal flexibility and a constant drive for daily improvement. In capitalism, people are primarily invoked as isolated private producers linked to each other through money and commodity relations. Other forms of relationships are considered inferior and are either displaced or, if they are indispensible—

like childrearing—trimmed to the needs of the general valorisation process and shaped by it. This development has intensified over the course of the last decades and has even further advanced the isolation of bourgeois individuals. In this context, Sigmund Freud's concept of narcissism has acquired a steep career in recent years. Fitting titles, for example, are increasingly appearing on the lists of bestsellers. For example, The Narcissistic Society [*Die narzisstische Gesellschaft*] by psychoanalyst Hans-Joachim Maaz (2012), A Generation Unable to Commit [*Generation Beziehungsunfähig*] by journalist Michael Nast (2016) or Me First! A Society of the Ego Trip [*Ich zuerst! Eine Gesellschaft auf dem EGO-Trip*] by political scientist Heike Leitschuh (2018). Furthermore, the issue is increasingly taken up in the daily press since the election of the narcissist spectacle [*Paradenarzissten*] of Donald Trump to the 45th presidency. For the US president, it is an almost daily occurrence.

The main feature of narcissism is seen in the spread of a rampant trend in self-centeredness (Mühl 2015: 4) which manifests itself in individuals in the form of a grandiose sense of self-importance, fantasies of boundless success and unlimited power as well as the longing for excessive admiration. However, behind this surface resides markedly weak self-esteem. Narcissists have an insatiable hunger for external recognition and affirmation (Kohut 2009: 146), which makes them extremely vulnerable to neoliberal demands for flexible adaptation. As such, many of them are masters of self-portrayal and self-promotion (Twenge and Campbell 2009: 28).

Narcissism in postfordism

Sigmund Freud was the first to have dealt with the phenomenon of narcissism in 1914. To become a mature and self-confident member of bourgeois society, every person between the age of three and five must, according to Freud, go through and overcome what he calls the Oedipus complex. This process takes place within the framework of the bourgeois nuclear family. As such, the young person makes the decisive step towards the development of their own bourgeois personality and the ability to participate in the material and symbolic reproduction of society. Among other things, the result is a general career advancement maintained and cultivated in typical petty-bourgeois families. The adapted achievements associated with the oedipal orientation—above all the general willingness to work, diligence

and self-discipline—were rewarded in earlier periods with the fact that a predefined life, clear structures and an overall secure professional future were assured.

While passing through the oedipal phase in childhood, something else at the same time occurs. In initiating the socialisation of young people for bourgeois subjectivity, they are confronted with the fundamental risk of failure in society. The young person reacts to this potential hazard by imagining a state of complete independence and denies their dependence on others. While the oedipal portion of the subject as an 'accomplished man' not only succumbs without complaint to external conditions but also actively contributes to their future maintenance and reproduction, the narcissistic part defends itself against a restricting and threatening external reality and finds itself with an inwardness that is its absolute and omnipotent ruler.

This second psychological tendency has been enormously promoted in postfordism—that is, since the 1970s—which has led to the fact that it has now supplanted the primacy of oedipal occurrences. Today, professional security has become a luxury. Thus, 'correct' oedipal behaviour is less and less rewarded. No one acquires peace from the whims of the 'free market.' Jobs are no longer stable; they can be outsourced, restructured or simply eliminated at any moment (Twenge and Campbell 2009: 52). Anyone can now suddenly become useless due to unpredictable developments such as a sudden change in mass taste or a new method of production whose introduction no one could anticipate. It is an increasingly unreliable and life-threatening world in which individuals are completely thrown back into themselves. The oedipal portion of the personality thus has fewer and fewer points of reference by which it can orient itself. Against this, the feeling of being defenceless [schutzlos] is growing. Individuals do everything they can to suppress this feeling since it feels like a death sentence.

By simultaneously increasing a requisite of unconditional flexibility and capacity for self-promotion, the narcissistic personality makes tremendous strides. The sale of labour-power increasingly becomes the sale of one's own personality, as if it were a commodity (Distelhorst 2014: 67). One must always present the version of what is currently in demand within the world of work. With the question in mind of how one can increase one's own

market value, or at least prevent it from decline, everything that has so far made up one's own personality is gradually given away, little by little; it is a constant practice of self-denial, which becomes easier the more one has already revealed themselves. Such a life corresponds with intense feelings of emptiness and a lack of authenticity (Lasch 1979: 50-1). Given the constant readiness to adapt at work and frequent partner changes, who can say what kind of person he or she really is, or isn't? It is precisely this process that leads to a narcissistic personality, which can amount to anything insofar as behind it sits a great void [*Nichts*] (Ibid: 98).

Women integrated into the general development

For a long time, the general economic conformity of young people applied almost exclusively to males. Until about the 1970s, female adolescents underwent a different development. At that time, the female child 'enters the Oedipus situation as though into a haven of refuge.' (Freud 2001: 129), preparing not for the role as a competitor but as a future wife and mother. At that time, a division of labour between the sexes dominated, which was associated with, on the one hand, the formation of a primarily masculine public sphere in which universal competition dominated and, on the other, a primarily feminine private sphere within the family (Bösch 2000: 115). Among other things, the woman also held responsibility for the care and education of the children.

Over the last five decades however, a certain gender equalisation has taken place. Nevertheless, it still corresponds to the image of typical masculinity, to be professionally successful and to earn the majority of the family income. Women are almost always the first to be left behind when it comes to spare time for the family. Although men were accommodated to housework, women still spend about an hour and a half more than their male counterparts each day on domestic work (Leclerc 2019: 25). Moreover, due to the forced employment of both partners, many families have no choice but to hand over their offspring to professional educational institutions as early as possible, that is, nurseries and kindergartens. Children are increasingly maltreated there with support measures and developmental surveys. Both primarily occur as preparation for the education system and thus indirectly for employment, even if it is still a ways away.

In addition, parents increasingly use their time and energy to prepare children as early as possible for universal competition. Many provide their children shortly after birth with educational toys, such as 'Baby Einstein' videos, or even resound the fetus with supposedly beneficial classical music (Twenge and Campbell 2009: 40). More and more children are living in a performance-oriented home. The result is the increasing experience of deep loneliness already in childhood (Leitschuh 2018: 143). Due to the general uncertainty of life in postfordism described above, social constraints appear increasingly earlier and abruptly, while at the same time, experiences of personal commitment and affection are being pushed aside.

Capitalism and psychological constitution

The essential core of capitalist societies is self-valorising value, that is, money as capital whose sole purpose therein is to transform itself into even more money through the detour of a produced and sold commodity (or performed service): 'capital invested to generate capital, to generate capital, to generate capital' (Distelhorst 2014: 105)—an endless and completely pointless circle that absorbs everything around it. At the centre of this movement is nothing but the emptiness of endless self-reproduction, an empty nothing. Step by step, this movement undermines every other meaningful relationship by dragging everything into its empty tautology (Ibid: 113).

In late modernity, people are in competition with one another to an even greater extent than ever before. As described above, the world of work today no longer appears as reliable, while remaining a nevertheless high-demanding structure into which one has to willingly integrate in order to be able to lead a safe and pleasant life. Instead, drastic changes threaten at all times and from all sides. This, among other things, is demonstrated in the expansion of precarious employment relationships, the dismantling and increasing repressiveness of the welfare state and in the return of poverty. The fear of failure in capitalism is omnipresent. Personal relations are also rapidly sacrificed to all-round flexibility and degenerate either to momentary partnerships or to 'networks' that above all help to maintain as many 'contacts' as possible and so increase career options (Samol 2016: 42). In this environment, empathy

for other people is a luxury one can afford less and less (Leitschuh 2018: 117).

General desirability of narcissistic behaviours

Narcissistic behaviours are now considered desirable almost everywhere and lead to success: in the world of work, in media, in politics and in many other places, they are honoured with recognition, admiration and promotion. In view of these circumstances, it is seriously discussed in professional circles whether narcissism, in recent psychiatric diagnostic standards, should any longer be considered a personality disorder. Today, not only one's skills, but also one's own feelings, personal characteristics and relationships have become a by-product of universal marketing. In the totally flexible and generally insecure performance society [*Leistungsgesellschaft*] of the new millennium, narcissists are no longer firmly bound but always ready to reinvent themselves; they are the appropriate subject form for crisis capitalism.

Here mercilessly adaptable self-promoters without strong bonds (neither to other people nor to their enterprise or profession) are produced and encouraged. People counter this emptiness and lack of relationships with the conviction that they are something special. They cultivate the imagination of their own grandeur, strength and brilliance. Even with only an internship or a poorly paid job with lousy working conditions and no future prospects, they bend the truth to look and feel better. While constantly on the brink of nothingness, at the same time they nourish the possibility of really being able to achieve everything. Internally, this corresponds to the dichotomy of their fantasies of omnipotence, i.e. the illusion of absolute individual freedom and independence on the one hand, and the feeling of powerlessness in the face of the growing insecurity and heteronomy of their own alienated existence on the other (Lewed 2005: 131). This opposition not only arises in the family constellation, but is also anchored in bourgeois society on the whole. Like the money that has become capital, which after its successful reproduction must once more immediately search for the next investment opportunity, so also must individuals immediately set out and search for the next success, so that inner emptiness and severe anxieties do not become rampant. Both capital and the narcissistic personality find themselves in an infinite, empty and tautological movement—and that is why they

complement and promote each other so well.

Prospects

In the form of perpetually self-praising narcissists—grossly overestimating themselves and unable to forge binding ties, who must sell themselves every day in the form of highly flexible labour-power—the isolated private producer requisite to the capital relation reaches its consummate form. Empty inside, restless for external confirmation and superficial recognition for their personal aspirations, they conduct themselves congenially to the meaningless, infinite and ultimately senseless movement of capital valorisation. This also has terrible dark sides. If narcissists fail to meet the demands of society, they are inclined towards substitute actions in which their narcissistically over-determined instinctual energies can act out alternatives. The most destructive by far is the killing spree. Here unfolds narcissistic megalomania, which takes place on the path to self-destruction and the destruction of others (Wissen 2017: 6).

It should be clear that it cannot be a sign of mental health to be well adapted to a sick society (Nast 2016: 230). The sublation of the narcissistic subject form, however, is excluded under prevailing conditions. A life outside narcissistic self-regulation would look completely different: without the madness of labor, without competition and performance anxiety, without the struggle of going it alone and without the pressure for permanent selfpromotion and self-assertion. As long as these constraints prevail, the basic prerequisites are lacking for the development of free social individuals beyond the commodity-form subjectivity. The hope lies in recognizing that we as human beings are species-beings that require more diverse and not merely one-dimensional relationships with each other. The material conditions for this are already given in our world characterised by overproduction. To this end, however, we must no longer leave socialization to the unconscious process of valorisation, which confronts us as compulsion and which we in turn execute and reproduce on a daily basis (Bösch 2000: 120). This process is becoming increasingly dysfunctional, but unfortunately without resulting in an automatism leading us into a liberated society. It is therefore by no means certain that it will be possible to overcome the destructive social process and replace it through a conscious socialization. A fundamental critique of the

subject form in capitalism and its inner psychosocial logic and dynamics is a necessary first step in this direction.

References

Bösch, Robert (2000) "Allmacht und Ohnmacht. Zur Psychopathologie des bürgerlichen (d. h. männlichen) Subjekts." In: *Krisis* 23, pp. 99-120.

Bude, Heinz (2019) "Solidarität ist keine Hängematte" (Interview). In: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 14.3, 32.

Distelhorst, Lars (2014) Leistung: Das Endstadium der Ideologie. Bielefeld: transcript.

Freud, Sigmund (2001) "Femininity." In: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XXII. London: Vintage.

Kohut, Heinz (2009) *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissitic Personality Disorders*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lasch, Christopher (1979) *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Leclerc, Florian (2019) "Aufstehen gegen Rassismus." In: Frankfurter Rundschau, 18.3, 25.

Leitschuh, Heike (2018) *Ich zuerst! Eine Gesellschaft auf dem EGO-Trip*. Frankfurt am Main: Westend.

Lewed, Karl-Heinz (2005) "Schopenhauer on the Rocks: Über die Perspektiven postmoderner Männlichkeit." In: *Krisis* 29, pp. 100-42.

Maaz, Hans-Joachim (2012) *Die narzisstische Gesellschaft: Ein Psychogramm*. Munich: C.H. Beck.

Mühl, Melanie (2015) "Narzissmus: Ich kam, ich sah, ich wirkte." In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24.2. http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/narzissmus-ist-das-krankheits-bild-unserer-zeit-13443497.html/.

Nast, Michael (2016) Generation Beziehungsunfähig. Hamburg: Edel Books.

Samol, Peter (2016) "All the Lonely People: Narzissmus als adäquate Subjektform des Kapitalismus." In: *Krisis* 4. http://www.krisis.org/2016/all-the-lonely-people-krisis-42016>.

Schindler, Jörg (2016) "Die steile Karriere des Wörtchens 'selbst'." In: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 20.8, pp. 22-3.

Twenge, Jean M., Campbell, Keith W. (2009) *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*. New York: Atria.

Wissen, Leni (2017) "Die sozialpsychische Matrix des bürgerlichen Subjekts in der Krise." In: *Exit!* 14. http://www.exit-online.org/textanz1.php? tabelle=autoren&index=20&posnr=561>.

What are the Children Lacking?

Anselm Jappe

Translated by Eric-John Russell; original French to be published in *Illusio*.

Children grow up on window sills,
Who stay forever in the shade.
And they don't know that followers call,
Telling of freedom, wind, and joy.
They must be children, young and sad.

— Rainer Maria Rilke

With *The Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) undoubtedly offered one of the broadest portrayals of human attitudes toward life, and also, in general, one of the most optimistic. In his collection of one hundred short stories, it is the power of amorous desire that is at the centre and almost always triumphs in the end. In the introduction to the fourth day, the author intervenes directly (the tales themselves are always told by the ten characters which gathered there). He evokes a man who stays with an infant son after the death of his wife and decides to raise him far from all temptation and sin. He retires with him to a cabin in the mountains, out from which he never takes his son. The son never sees any woman or any other person. But when he is eighteen, the father one day agrees to take him with him to Florence, "reflecting that this son of his was now grown up and no longer likely to be attracted to worldly things because he was so inured to the service of God". But as soon as the son sees "a party of elegantly dressed and beautiful young ladies", he asks his father what they were. The father replied: "My son […] keep your eyes fixed on the ground and don't look at them, for they are evil. […] They are called goslings."[1]

The son, however, sees many women during the day, and each time his father tells him not to worry about the "goslings". "Now, the extraordinary thing about it was that the young man, who had never set eyes on one of these objects before, took no further interest in the

palaces, the oxen, the horses, the asses, the money, or any of the other things he had encountered, and promptly replied: "'Oh, father, do please get me one of those goslings. [...] As far as I am concerned, I don't think I have ever in my whole life seen anything so pretty or attractive. They are more beautiful than the painted angels that you have taken me to see so often. O alas! if you have any concern for my welfare, do make it possible for us to take one of these goslings back with us, and I will pop things into its bill.' Certainly not,' said his father. 'Their bills are not where you think, and require a special sort of diet.' But no sooner had he spoken than he realized that his wits were no match for Nature, and regretted having brought the boy to Florence in the first place."[2]

The moral of this fable is as clear today as it was in Boccaccio's time: amorous desire is an innate, natural force that awakens at the slightest external stimulation. You cannot avoid it or get around it. Moreover, the barb against Christian morality is obvious. Today, it would be difficult to find anyone who would condemn the teaching of this fable. Today, however, it can be read in quite the opposite sense. Fortunately, there exist people who remain skeptical of contemporary society, or even hostile to it, at least to some of its features. And when such people happen to have children, they usually make efforts to protect them from those aspects of daily life they deem particularly harmful. Often they sacrifice a lot of time, energy and money. Yet despite this they are frequently disappointed. They bake the best organic cookies at home—and the children, from a certain age, prefer industrial cake and Coca-Cola over juice from the garden. Parents don't leave them in front of the television, but spend hours playing with them—and the children, as soon as they can, gorge themselves on the stupidest Internet programs. They take them to the mountains to enjoy nature, and the children run away to the nightclubs. The grandparents tell them long stories, and the children swear by their tablets. Parents teach them that human bonds are more precious than the objects of consumption, and children force them to pay large sums for designer clothes. The parents, although exhausted after a day's work, suggest a game of football or chess, but the kids don't want to tear themselves away from their laptops or mobile phones.

This is a frequent, though fortunately not universal, observation. Parents of this type can easily feel like they have lost the battle, and that their children are "lost to the enemy". This feeling of failure may be that of parents who, living in a neighborhood where drugs are

rampant, do their utmost to protect their children but find that it was all in vain; children have become users or sellers of drugs, with all the foreseeable consequences. It is as if we were in the presence of a very peculiar version of the moral of Boccaccio's fable: the desire for the most abject or banal trickery provided by industry seems to be awakened at first contact, even if every effort has been made to educate children to withstand such lures. And the industry that produces "Mars" and tablets, "Coca-Cola" and "Adidas," can even then boast of responding to the "real" desires and "true" nature of children, liberating them from the influence of parents abused by an ideology or simply "backward".

Obviously, the desire for tablets and Coca-Cola is not at all "natural" in the same way as amorous desire. However, one can get the impression that industrial capitalism, which has succeeded in perverting so many things, has also managed to make addiction to its products appear as an innate and irrepressible desire. Should we look for the cause in the bad example set by the other children? Does "peer pressure" prove to be stronger than family pressure? Could it be the strength of advertising and the media? Or is it simply the rebellion of the adolescent, who once revolted against conformist morality but today, on the contrary, confronts the non-conformism of his parents? Does he feel that there may be hypocrisy and falsehood in the attitude of his parents?

All of this certainly comes into play. Yet there is no denying that these products *are indeed desired*. It is necessary to force the worker and the peasant, with whip or threat of hunger, to work for a boss, necessary to use violence to wrest the possessions from people, for example in colonial conquests. But, as Ivan Illich already remarked, no one is forced to drink Coca-Cola. The diffusion of industrial objects (in contrast, to cite Illich again, to "convivial tools"[3]) operates through *seduction*. These facts are well known. But why are these objects so seductive? The common explanation, systematized by advocates of the free market, is that these objects really do make life more pleasant. Consumers vote with their wallets. This is a democracy. It is their choice. Opposed to this is a critical explanation: seduction is a matter of manipulation, of advertising. This is the consequence of certain political choices (for example, to install the electronic and the digital everywhere).

Here we are going to propose another route: industrial objects intended for children—let's

call them that, even if the term is vague—cause regression at all levels. And the reason they succeed so well is because they can lean on tendencies that already exist in individuals. They come to meet the very profound desire of children to remain children and to avoid the pain of growing and maturing. But what is the child, what is childhood? It would be absurd to answer it briefly, as so much has been written on this theme. Let us remember, however, that interest in childhood is quite recent and only really began in the eighteenth century. Before Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Saint Augustine was the only one to begin his autobiography with memories of his early childhood. But as soon as childhood became an object of study and theorization (precisely with Rousseau's *Emile*), we find the same dualism, the same internal opposition that informs all modern conceptions of man and society and to which we can, for convenience, attach the tutelary and paradigmatic names of Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

The current mainstream, which since Hobbes (who himself does not yet speak of childhood) sees in the human being a ferocious beast by nature that must be tamed by strong institutions, logically considers the child to be even more beastly than the adult, because it is an animal in its pure state that has not yet been domesticated by education and that lacks only the strength to follow its most violent instincts.[4] This vision of the child, considered as a savage to whom civilization must be brought by curbing its instincts, is at the basis of pedagogies that have been, at least until recently, the most applied. It can also be found, in a more sophisticated form, in Freud: the child remains attached to its "polymorphic perversion" and incestuous desires if it is not forced by external forces (especially the repression of oedipal desire) to evolve towards a more realistic and less narcissistic attitude. However, the child retains all through its life nostalgia for this lost original omnipotence. It even risks falling back into it at any time, individually and collectively. The "discontent of civilization"[5] that concerned Freud in the last phase of his thought, considered "pessimistic", is basically a rebellion of the child, whom Freud identified with "nature" (and also with the "savage").

At the opposite pole is a conception of the child that emphasizes its natural innocence, which society then corrupts. Its original potential must therefore be preserved. This approach was mainly diffused in the twentieth century and produced, among other things,

the free education already practiced by libertarians before the First World War (Francisco Ferrer's "Modern School" being the best-known model) and then, in the 1970s, so-called "anti-authoritarian" education. This approach also prompted the Montessori, Freinet and Steiner-Waldorf pedagogies, reaching much wider circles and touching more generally on the pedagogical conceptions that became widely accepted in the family and at school from the 1950s onwards.

Another feature of this vision of the child as the bearer of an original grace that customary education only ruins, is the enthusiasm for children's drawing, so frequent in the art of the twentieth century and anticipated by the phrase of Baudelaire: "genius is nothing more nor less than *childhood recovered* at will".[6] In the first page of the first *Surrealist Manifesto*, we read: "If he [man] still retains a certain lucidity, all he can do is turn back toward his childhood which, however his guides and mentors may have botched it, still strikes him as somehow charming. [...] This imagination that knows no bounds is henceforth allowed to be exercised only in strict accordance with the laws of an arbitrary utility; it is incapable of assuming this inferior role for very long and, in the vicinity of the twentieth year, generally prefers to abandon man to his lusterless fate."[7] Towards the end of the *Manifesto*, Breton writes: "The mind [*L'esprit*] that plunges into Surrealism relives with glowing excitement the best part of its childhood. [...] It is perhaps childhood that comes closest to one's 'real life'; childhood beyond which man has at his disposal, aside from his passport, only a few complimentary tickets; childhood where everything nevertheless conspires to bring about the effective, risk-free possession of oneself. Thanks to Surrealism, it seems that opportunity knocks a second time."[8] And we know the phrase attributed to Picasso: "It took me four years to paint *like* Raphael, but a lifetime to paint *like a child*."

Many parents, and even teachers, refused to represent "authority" over children and to be figures of their superegos replacing the father figure derived from the oedipal conflict. These figures—the father, the teacher, the officer, the boss, the political leader—were now accused of ensuring the integration of the individual into a repressive society. In the eyes of these rebels against traditional education, who swarmed after 1968, it was no longer possible to do what Hannah Arendt still proposed in 1958 in "The Crisis in Education", speaking about the teacher: "Vis-à-vis the child it is as though he were a representative of all

adult inhabitants, pointing out the details and saying to the child: This is our world."[9]

However, this craze for childhood as a treasure to be preserved also found its critics, and not only in the reactionary field. Already in 1963, the German Freudian psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich published an important book on the "society without fathers" [10], and in the same year Herbert Marcuse utilized this concept in his essay on the "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man"[11]. The "death of the father" became a common term, whether to celebrate or complain about. Some observers saw in the refusal of consecrated parental roles only a justification for the flight from educational responsibilities. Especially since the beginning of the new millennium, voices have been raised to denounce the "liberalization" of education, which has finally favoured the arrival of the "liquid" and consumerist individual, open to all winds. Dany-Robert Dufour calls for the reintroduction of a "subtraction of enjoyment" from childhood, before it is too late.[12] A child who grows up "without limits" will not be happy, nor a strong individual, but will be very weak and narcissistic; it will constantly need the crutches of consumption. The infantilization of contemporary society has often been described.[13] We can, in the same way, speak of a "disappearance of childhood"; we have the impression today that there is neither childhood nor adulthood anymore, but an eternal adolescence, without development, maturation or achievement.

According to the progressive *doxa*, education has considerably improved over the last sixty years. It is hard to believe that corporal punishment in schools was still common in the 1950s! The schools described by Jean Vigo in his film *Zero for Conduct* (1933) or by Robert Musil in his first novel *The Confusions of Young Törless* seem to belong to a world forever gone. More generally, it seems that the relationship to the child has completely changed (contraception has played a central role here). Never before have the children who are born today been so desired and been the object of so much attention, care, concern and expectation as well. They are precious because they are rare, whereas in the past, people often waited before becoming attached to their children, when half of them died before their fifth year. At least in "advanced" countries, babies are no longer wrapped in swaddling clothes like mummies, given to nannies for the first year of life, or hung on the wall while parents work in the fields. If they are beaten, sexually exploited or used as a labour force,

parents commit a crime, and the authorities are supposed to intervene. They are no longer considered as extra mouths to feed, nor do they come into the world in twelfth place after a series of exhausting pregnancies. Today, their arrival is normally planned and highly desired, and the lives of parents are organized around them. Often it is the children who must give "meaning" to the lives of their parents.

Given the importance of childhood for the development of future adults, humanity should never be as happy as it is today. But who honestly has that impression? Are children really more fulfilled than ever before in history? By modern criteria, the childhoods of the past should have produced serial monsters. Of course there were some—but were there more than today? What are the children of today lacking to be happy? Perhaps they're missing precisely the most important thing: childhood. Childhood and what makes childhood a childhood. We have the undocumented, the landless, the transportless, the homeless, and there even exists a movement of "sans-rien". But can we imagine a world without childhood? A world without childhood, and therefore without games and imagination? Yes, this is what ours is becoming.

Today, the only thing that is virtually forbidden to do with children is to use them for sexual purposes. For the rest, everything is permitted. Invent television channels specifically for babies under two years of age or abandon your own children for eight hours a day in front of a screen, have them habitually eat at McDonald's or equip them with small motorcycles by the age of five; and there is no scandal about it. The real rape of childhood is not only committed by pedophile priests, but also by those who market portable consoles. However, no one has ever been taken to court for leaving their child in front of the television screen for 12 hours, and this happens even in families that are not 'disadvantaged.' Nor is anyone doomed to public shame for inventing, selling or buying 'Furbys' or 'Tamagotchis' that teach children that it is better to be fond of a robot than a living being. In this way we can also ensure that such children, when one day they are sick or old, agree to be cared for by a robot, instead of complaining about it like their stubborn and backward-looking parents and grandparents, who insist on human company without considering the costs.

An old lady told me about the very silly activities that were imposed upon children in

kindergarten when she went there—that is, in the 1920s: thread beads on a piece of yarn and then detach them to start again.[14] Today, everyone would scream in indignation at such a caricatural 'occupational therapy.' But why don't they protest against games where the child's activity is limited to contemplating dolls that do everything by themselves? To save the economy, we sacrifice even the children. No market is more promising than that of children and young people. Advertising experts have discovered children as 'prescribers' of family purchases. Anyone criticizing this branch of the economy would be seen as an enemy of growth and jobs. We see that children are still and always the most vulnerable and that they pay the price for all the follies of society. But what are the consequences for the children themselves?

Image, Imagination, Reading

'Beloved imagination, what I most like in you is your unsparing quality,'[15] wrote Breton at the beginning of the *Surrealist Manifesto*. The observation of the deterioration and impoverishment of the imagination must be central to any critique of capitalist modernity, the electronic media and the 'disappearance of childhood.' We find this loss in the most banal examples: the old toys, such as the stuffed animals and dolls of yesteryear, were not very 'realistic' and especially did not adapt much to the requirements of the child (impossibility to move the limbs, head or torso of the dolls). The imagination had to compensate for the object's shortcomings; it was rather a support, a stimulation for the imagination, a point of departure. The increase of 'realism' that chases the imagination is a constant feature of modern culture, for example in the transition from theatre to cinema, and is in a strange contrast to its withdrawal in the field of the plastic arts and literature.

Image and imagination seem, already by their etymology, very close, almost identical. And yet it seems that it is precisely the preponderance of images that kills the imagination. It is easy to observe that prefabricated images tend to inhibit the formation of personal experiences and an individual vision of the world. [16] But the problem is not limited to industrially produced images. It concerns the modern hegemony of images over speech in general. Imagination does not consist only of images, and for the development of the imagination, images may be less useful than language and writing. Today, it seems quite

difficult for children growing up in an illiterate milieu to discover books in the public library, to become enthusiastic about them and eventually to become writers themselves, as was often the case in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A standardized imagination ensures that nothing new can happen, and nothing truly individual. It is a product of capitalist society and is part of that society's progressive stranglehold over childhood; a stranglehold that began with compulsory schooling and continued with the various forms of totalitarianism (an intrusion already dreamt up by Plato and Campanella), very intent on forcing its way into domestic households. However, intrusions such as *Hitlerjugend* or *Komsomol* were still very imperfect with regard to what the media and digital technology do. Above all, they have the capacity to intervene at the decisive phase of a person's early formation (during the first five years). Besides, they're much more fun than a military march. So they're more appealing. Thus, German anti-Nazi families sometimes succeeded in thwarting the influence of Nazi institutions on their children by delivering opposition discourse within the privacy of the home. Today, for what does the opinion count of a parent who reproaches his child for an immoderate consumption of the means of 'communication'? [17]

The unhealthy habit of sending toddlers to nurseries operates in the same sense: a devaluation of so-called 'primary' education, an expropriation of parents. It is always justified by the pressure of the labor market. Thus, the 'progressives' are very pleased that in France the age of compulsory schooling will be lowered to three years in 2019! This sequestration of children is historically unprecedented. Of course, it cannot be denied that the external environment is sometimes better than the original family, but this intervention essentially reflects an ambition of the state not to allow any milieu to escape it; not to mention that capitalist society is not a real community, but obeys the market! However, it is not only about profit. Those who propose to 'reshape' the human being must begin as soon as possible. Thus, to cite just one example, the installation of biometric checkpoints in school canteens has been justified by the stated intention to 'habituate' children to them.

Nowhere is this more visible than in the digital boom. Computer technology has dealt the

hardest blow to childhood yet. It has nullified both orality, with the personal authority it confers, and writing, which gives access to infinity. It is currently the greatest vector of regression—and this in a uniform manner throughout the world, practically without resistance, and with the enthusiastic support of all the players.

From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe (1962): thus did the historian of philosophy Alexandre Koyré summarize the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. Now, four centuries after Galileo, thanks to information technology, you could spend your entire life in a 'closed universe', i.e. without ever leaving your room, earn your money by telecommuting and have everything you need delivered, communicate via the Internet, have virtual sex, undergo surgery remotely, and even procreate while remaining alone. Voyage Around my Room (1794) would take on a different meaning today, [19] and Kaspar Hauser became a metaphor for a generalized human condition.

Imagination, and thought itself, is largely born out of *daydreaming*. It is by dreaming, or better said by daydreaming, in the associations that follow one another, that the mind detaches itself from the immediate and finds its freedom, and often the premises for action. But daydreaming takes time, and is often born out of *boredom*. It is when the mind has nothing to do—for example during journeys on public transport—that the imagination takes flight. Likewise when one does not want to do what one has to do—the book of Latin declensions falls to the ground and the student dreams of being Caesar. But everything changes when a pleasant distraction is always available. Armed with a smartphone, the contemporary individual never wonders: 'What am I going to do in the meantime?' He never gets bored. From one reading you can easily be distracted to dream—from one screen you are only distracted to move on to the next screen. The mind is thus never in the embarrassment of not knowing what to do and having to find resources within itself. In this way, the contents of the mind always come from the outside, are always manufactured by others. How could such an imagination ever be personal, not to say subversive?

Children get the impression that their parents have nothing left to pass on to them, that there is nothing their parents know better than they do and which would make them indispensable mediators with the world. Natural authority disappears, which opens the door to

authoritarianism. Anything a parent wants to offer or impose on their child—piano lessons or history studies, fishing or crafts, mountain hikes or social games—has to appear more attractive than the *smartphone*. How can you concentrate entire days on a book when the 'news' on the Internet tries to capture your attention every thirty seconds? Why learn multiplication tables if you have a calculator at your disposal, why learn a language when Google translation is available? Of course, not all children think this way, but they will soon form a tiny minority, like those today who can still read Latin.

The Third Path Towards Humanization

The freedom apparently given to children in recent decades is therefore not one. In the name of 'respect for their choices,' children have become the privileged target of a state wishing to 'format' them as early as possible, and of a market that succeeds in passing off what it imposes as the satisfaction of the child's spontaneous desires and needs. But to return to our initial question, can everything be explained by 'manipulation'? Is there not instead within children, as a long tradition has it, an innate greed for pleasure, as in all human beings, which always ends up imposing itself?

Faced with this dilemma that, as we have said, has been the delight of bourgeois thought for three centuries, it is necessary to insist on a 'third' possibility. [20] The human being has very little 'nature,' neither good nor bad, but is always constituted by society. [21] The inclinations that we might qualify as 'bad' (greed, appetite for power, aggression) can be limited, or diverted to other ends, with the instruments of civilization. The classic study by anthropologist Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State* (1974), describes the recourses used by some 'primitive' societies for preventing the autonomization of political power, by channeling the will of some individuals to be at the forefront, towards innocent purposes, such as oration, or by attributing simple prestige as a recompense for sustained efforts for the good of the community.

Capitalist and industrial modernity has dismantled these instruments of *containment*. It lives by the unleashing of impulses. Man is nothing without education; he wouldn't even walk on his feet. It cannot therefore be a question of simply 'developing a potential' that already

exists; it must undergo a process of humanization. It demands an effort and cannot always follow the inclinations of the child. Its psychic evolution is not spontaneous; it unfolds under the pressure of necessity (such as the threat of castration, in the broadest sense). Renouncing the fantasies of omnipotence is painful. In the past, it was imposed by society and paved the way (at least potentially) for the development of the personality; today, children are encouraged not to grow up and remain in a pre-oedipal stage. Virtuality tickles the desire for omnipotence. Thus, the much debated question of whether video games make people violent or not is ultimately secondary. The problem resides in the virtual relationship to the world, and if in video games we were just picking flowers, the consequences for the psyche might not be so different. The danger is in the medium itself, as television has already shown. It was much less 'total,' compared to today's devices, but nevertheless opened the door to the anthropological mutation taking place.

Young people of today are not, of course, born stupider than preceding generations. They might also have wasted their childhood with video games if they had existed. But they didn't exist, and you had to pass the time by reading books, playing football in the street or venturing into the forests. It is obvious that the world of the past was not globally 'better.' There have always been very moronic ways of living and educating one's children. If the electronic media can make a breach so easily, it is because it fulfills a void that already exists in the lives of many people. Television often simply replaced village gossip and video games replaced stones thrown at dogs in the streets. Modernity did not create dumbingdown [l'abrutissement], but has invented new and better-equipped forms of it. For a long time now, almost all of humanity has lived in oppressive societies, and this is reflected in all areas of life. The fact remains that in pre-modern societies there were wide areas where neither the state nor the market, neither money nor abstract labor were present.

Different cultures provide a wide variety of responses to the manifest tendencies of their members, especially children. Numerous works in comparative anthropology have studied the ways in which parents handle, for example, rivalry and jealousy between their children, or their aggressive and libidinal drives. Similarly, an individual who lives at the expense of society may, depending on the context, be subject to penalties or, conversely, to admiration. In all these cases, we are in the field of interpersonal relations, that is, between two or more

individuals. However, there is another level, more rarely taken into account. [22] While it remains very difficult to disentangle what is 'innate' from what is 'acquired'—that is, what is 'natural' and what is 'social'—in the interpersonal and social attitudes of individuals, there are 'existential situations' from which no human being can escape. These are above all the consequences of their 'premature birth' in comparison with even the most closely related animals, and the long and heavy dependence on those who care for them. This situation leads to a 'separation anxiety,' perhaps a 'trauma of birth,' certainly a 'state of distress' and helplessness of the newborn. The impossibility of a total and immediate satisfaction of the infant's desires, the consciousness of depending on others, and the appearance of aggressive and libidinal drives that the small child can only satisfy in fantasies are so many painful experiences from which no one can completely escape, even under the best conditions. They are part of an 'originary state' of the human being, as much as its physical constitution and its limits. Psychoanalysis was the first to look at this phase of life and its consequences. However, and this is a limitation, its research has generally focused on the strictly individual level.

However, it is obvious that no social context, no education can avoid the emergence of these painful situations. And given that they pertain almost exclusively to the relationship between the small child and their early 'guardians,' the role of society appears slight. It involves a universal condition, not something accidental, which 'went wrong' and could have been avoided by doing better, individually or socially. However, and this is another important affirmation of psychoanalysis, one never completely frees oneself from these initial anxieties. The painful feeling of impotence, the fear of separation and consequently of dependence, manifests itself in different forms throughout life. As such, these sensations and fears are not an indication of a defect that could have been avoided and for which we would have to search for culprits: parents, genes or society. But—and this is the essential point these repressed anxieties can return in the most varied forms—from the most destructive to the most constructive. Examples of 'regressive' solutions (as Lasch calls them, following the psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel [23] include drugs and violence, or the project of completely dominating nature through technology. As 'evolutionary' solutions, Lasch points to art, games and handicrafts—what psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott has called 'transitional objects.' [24] They are objects that allow us to establish an 'amicable'

relationship with the world, a world in which the individual finds itself. In this way one can relieve the wounds from the primary state, without ever making them completely disappear. Living in a world where one recognizes oneself is therefore one of the presuppositions of an acceptable life.

It is from here that a conjunction between psychoanalytical thought and the critique of political economy can be elaborated which will go far beyond the question of advertising. The abstraction [*L'abstractification*] of the world operated by value, which is the result of the abstract side of labor, has replaced sensible objects by pure quantities without quality. This process made the 'intermediate objects' referred to by Lasch disappear. In a society governed by commodities, narcissism is imposed as the dominant psychic form—and prevents children from maturing. It is of no surprise to see the children of today desiring their tablets with almost the same spontaneity with which the young boy in Boccaccio's fable desires the goslings…

Footnotes

- [1.] Boccaccio, Giovanni, *The Decameron*, trans. G.H. McWilliam. New York: Penguin Books, pp. 286-87.
- [2.] Ibid, pp. 287.
- [3.] Illich, Ivan (1973) *Tools for Conviviality*. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins.
- [4.] Freud, citing early intuitions of the existence of the Oedipus complex, mentions this sentence from Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*: "If the little savage were left to himself, preserving all his foolishness and adding to the small sense of a child in the cradle the violent passions of a man of thirty, he would strangle his father and lie with his mother." (Freud, Sigmund (1963) 'Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis' [1917], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 16, London: The Hogarth Press, p. 338.
- [5.] Freud, Sigmund (1961) 'Civilization and its Discontents' [1930], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 21, London: The Hogarth Press.
- [6.] Baudelaire, Charles (1995) The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays, trans. J.

- Mayne, New York: Phaidon Press, p. 8.
- [7.] Breton, André (1969) 'Manifesto of Surrealism' [1924], in *Manifestos of Surrealism*, trans. R. Seaver and H.R. Lane, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, pp. 3-4. [8.] Ibid, pp. 39-40.
- [9.] Arendt, Hannah, (1961) 'The Crisis in Education' [1954], in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, New York: The Viking Press, p. 189. How then should a teacher behave in a totalitarian regime?
- [10.] Mitscherlich, Alexander (1969) *Society Without the Father: A Contribution to Social Psychology*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- [11.] Marcuse, Herbert (1970): "Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man" In: *Five Lectures. Psychoanalysis, Politics and Utopia*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- [12.] Dufour, Dany-Robert (2014) *Le Délire occidental et ses effets actuels dans la vie quotidienne : travail, loisir, amour*, Paris: Les Liens qui libèrent, p. 309.
- [13.] For example, the American political scientist Benjamin Barber in *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).
- [14.] This would also be a good definition of abstract labor. One thinks of John M. Keynes who recommended digging holes and then filling them in as a valuable contribution to the national economy.
- [15.] Breton, André (1969) 'Manifesto of Surrealism' [1924], *Manifestos of Surrealism*, trans. R. Seaver and H. R. Lane, The University of Michigan Press.
- [16.] For all these considerations, see Jappe, Anselm (2017) *La Société autophage*. *Capitalisme*, *démesure et autodestruction*, La Découverte, pp. 168-77, pp. 224-7.
- [17.] In any case, that parent has to settle for little. A few decades ago, comic books were considered to be the lowest level of culture and the family might despair at the sight of children preferring them to books. Nowadays, it is easy for well-meaning teachers to say that it is 'already very good' if a child reads manga, because 'at least he reads,' while most other children just play at the console!
- [18.] 'In 2004, the microelectronics manufacturers (Gixel) published their Blue Book advising the government to make biometrics acceptable by conditioning the youngest, and prescribing an "education from nursery school" for technologies likely to be unwelcome and to arouse popular resistance.' In 'Livre bleu, grands programmes structurants, proposition

- des industries électroniques et numériques', July 2004. During 2006, following the revelation of this passage by an anti-biometrics collective, Gixel formally modified its Blue Book by removing the passage in question. See www.infokiosques.net.
- [19.] *Voyage Around my Room* was penned by Xavier de Maistre while in prison in Turin. It is in part an autobiographical about a young military official who imaginatively makes the world of the small room in which he is imprisoned.
- [20.] This is explained at much greater length in Jappe, Anselm (2017) *La Société autophage. Capitalisme, démesure et autodestruction*, La Découverte.
- [21.] In this context, it is worth mentioning the small book by anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, *The Western Illusion of Human Nature*. Sahlins, M. (2008) *The Western Illusion of Human Nature*, Prickly Paradigm Press.
- [22.] Among those who have done so is the American sociologist Christopher Lasch, whose theses, expounded in Lasch, Christopher (1979) *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations*, W. W. Norton & Company. and Lasch, Christopher (1984) *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company. I have taken up in appe, Anselm (2017) *La Société autophage. Capitalisme*, *démesure et autodestruction*, La Découverte.
- [23.] Lasch, Christopher (1984) *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, p. 181.
 [24.] Ibid, pp. 193-5.

